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August 11, 1896.

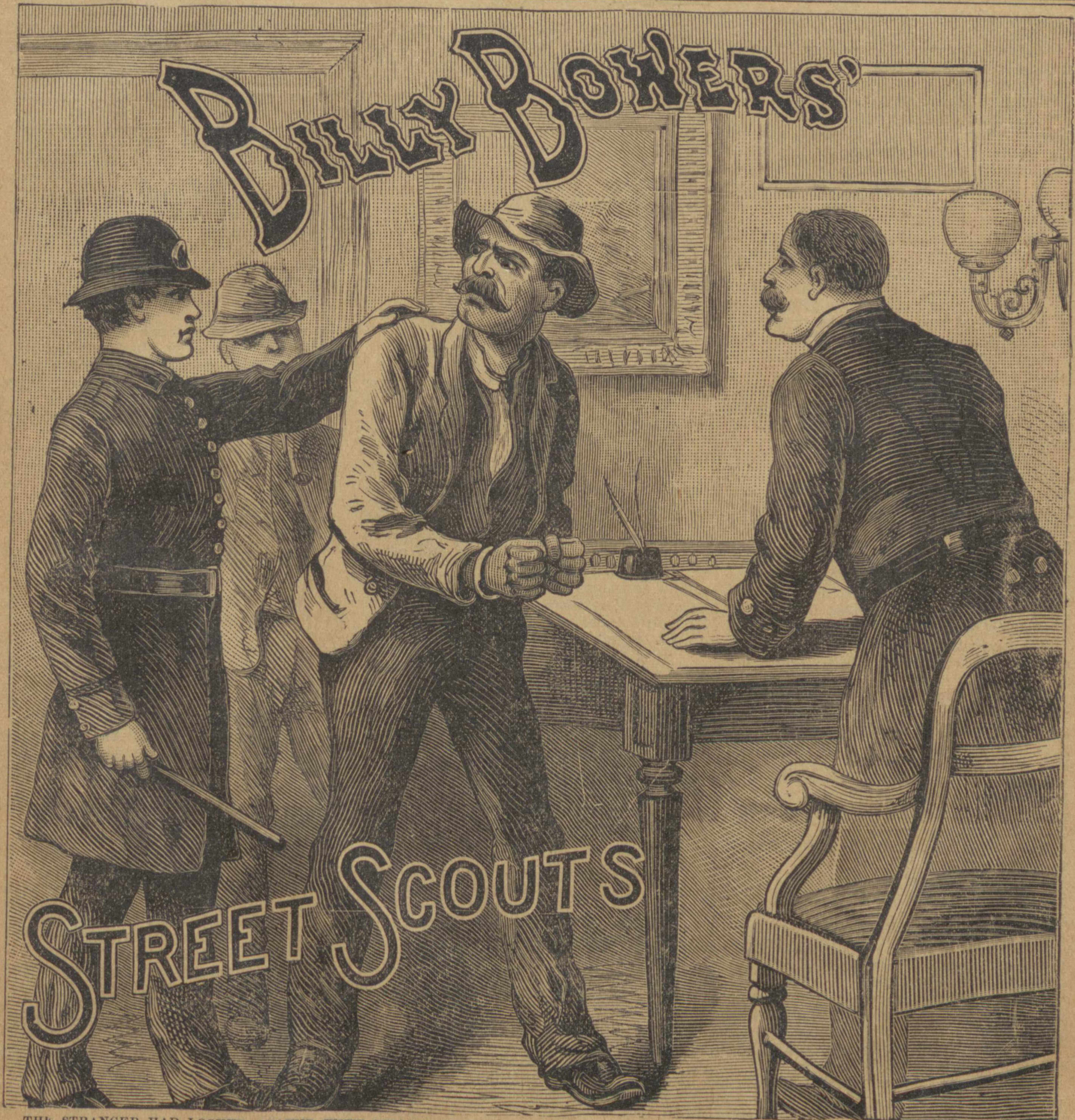
No. 994.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXIX.



THE STRANGER HAD LOOKED AROUND WITH SULLEN SURPRISE, WHILE THE POLICE CAPTAIN HALF-STARTED UP FROM HIS CHAIR.

Billy Bowers' Street Scouts;

OR,

RAIDING THE ROLLING ROCK.

STORY OF A MISSING

NEW YORK BOAT-CLUBMAN.

BY JO PIERCE,

AUTHOR OF "DICK OF THE DOCKS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOATHOUSE MYSTERY.

"We have been robbed!"

"What's that you say?"

"Every dollar has been cleaned out!"

"Impossible!"

"The ticket-office has been robbed of every dollar that was in it!"

"Who did it?"

"Nobody knows. The money is gone, and so is old Dan Sherrill."

"Then he has taken it and skipped?"

"That's the way it looks."

"The man that says he did it speaks falsely. Dan isn't that sort of a man; I'll swear to his innocence. Robbed? Our money gone? Then this is a hard blow, indeed. Taken from the ticket-office? Why, that is very strange! Who could have done it?"

The Bald Eagle Boat-Club was giving a theatrical performance. The club was one of the most favorably known of all that mustered boats along the East River, but it was made up of poor young men who had not always the money to buy the shells and other things needed to keep up with the zeal and ambition that possessed them.

There was a hall, or so-called theatre, connected with their boathouse, and on this occasion they were giving a play to supply funds for their use.

It was a very important affair to them—money must be had; and when they saw people come in such numbers they felt elated and thought they saw the financial cloud vanish. Now came this startling news.

The group who heard the announcement was back of the stage. They were a part of the actors, but, though the play was still progressing, they were awaiting their turns to go on again.

The messenger had come, flushed and excited; he had thrown them all into the same mood.

One of the actors was dressed like a policeman, with full uniform, buttons, and club. This was in keeping with the part he had taken in the play, and he had been the star of the evening. On the bills he appeared as William Edward Bowers, but those who knew him best in real life never spoke of him except as Billy Bowers.

It was he who had taken the part of the suspected man.

The stage manager happened to be present, and he noticed that the news had had ill effects.

"This won't do!" he declared. "Calm down, all of you, or you will not be fit for your parts when you go on again."

"Let the play go!" cried Billy. "There is more important business before us. Let's go and catch that miserable thief."

"Do you think your uniform makes you a policeman?"

"I'd like to try my luck," wistfully replied the youth.

At this moment a supernumerary rushed toward the group.

"The news has reached the audi-

ence!" he exclaimed. "They are breaking up—the play is interrupted!"

"Destruction!" cried the manager.

It was his idea that the reputation of the Bald Eagle Club was at stake, and he ran to stop the confusion. Billy Bowers, still holding his club, followed far enough to see the audience.

One glance was enough to tell that the performance was not to be finished. Nearly every one present was a friend of the boat-club, and deeply interested in the financial success of the occasion. When they knew that the money which had been depended upon to put the club on its feet for the summer campaign was gone, the audience fell into a panic.

All were on their feet and bustling about like disturbed bees by their hive.

The manager tried to make them resume their seats, but he utterly failed. Then even he gave up and yielded to the calamity of the evening. The play was postponed.

Billy Bowers was anxious to see all that was to be seen, so, as soon as he could do so, he hastened to the ticket office.

A group of excited youths was there, but its members were doing nothing. Those who had discovered the theft had hurried to the police station, and it was almost a statue-like party that Billy saw.

He looked around hurriedly. The money-drawer was open and empty.

"What is known of this?" he demanded.

"Nothing," answered a fellow-member.

"Who discovered it?"

"Dan Sherrill, the treasurer."

"Was everything as it is now?"

"I suppose so."

"Have you fellows hunted here?"

"What is there to hunt for?"

"If we knew we needn't hunt!"

Billy answered tartly, and with this he pushed further forward and began the search that seemed to him to be necessary.

If there had been absolute neatness in the place there would have been a plain little room not over twelve feet square, but the Bald Eagles were not the neatest persons in the world, and the office was generally littered with boxes and other rubbish. It was so then.

The active member of the party began to move these boxes and poke into crevices and cornices with the policeman's club to which he had unconsciously held.

"Billy thinks because he has a uniform on he'll develop into a detective!"

This sarcastic comment was from Peter Brison, a young fellow who had always been jealous of Billy, but the latter did not heed it. He was proceeding as he did partly because he hoped to find some stray part of the money, and partly because it seemed to be the correct way to make such a search.

"I wonder," added Peter, "if Dan Sherrill will skip the town or hide right here?"

"I never thought," replied Sam Conners, "that Dan was such a man as that."

"He always had a queer squint to his eyes. I always suspected him."

Billy Bowers looked up suddenly.

"Now, see here, Peter!" he exclaimed, "don't you go to wronging an innocent man."

"Do you mean that Dan didn't take the money?"

"Yes, I mean just that!"

"Bah! It's plain as day."

"It's nothing of the sort. I won't believe Dan Sherrill did it unless I have to!" emphatically asserted Billy.

Peter had another sarcastic reply

ready, but his rival did not heed it. He had moved a box, and then started back a little. He had caught sight of something most singular, in his estimation. A moment he looked in wonder, and then his companions were attracted by his exclamation:

"See here!"

"Hullo, what's that?"

"You say!"

"Some sort of an image."

"Well, I didn't know this was a statuary store."

The object which had attracted such attention was precisely what had been indicated. Briefly, it was a statue, but one that was as singular as it was unexpected.

It seemed to be made of porcelain, or some imitation. As one of the boys expressed it, it was a crockery idol. It was less than fifteen inches long, and of a bright green color. It represented a man dressed like a Turk, with a cap on his head and arms folded across his breast.

Billy drew it out fully, holding it in his hands.

"Whew!" exclaimed Sam Conners, "he has got a positively fiendish expression on his mug."

"If I met such a feller when I was alone I would run for keeps," added Benny Eager.

The criticisms were well made. The little old man had a bad face in the full sense of the word—a really sinister, crafty, malicious face. Whoever had made the figure had set out to instill certain mental attributes into it, and had succeeded to a charm.

"See him roll his eyes!" abruptly cried Benny.

It was a sudden freak on the part of the image. Its eyes did begin to roll, and Sam Conners first fell back a pace and then laughed at his apparently groundless fear.

"It must be the Evil One," suggested Benny.

Billy Bowers had discovered something more. There was a gentle sound of a peculiar nature, and he held the image close to his ear.

"Say, boys!" he then cried, "what do you think?"

"What is it?"

"This chap is breathing!"

"What?"

"Fact! I can both hear and feel him. Hold him to your own ear and you will notice it. Hear that soft, purring sound?"

"Yes."

"Don't you hear the air coming from his mouth?"

"I do, sure."

"Well, that's strange. An image that breathes! Say, are we all dreaming? Ugh! and see the old chap roll his eyes! Why, he is a very fiend!"

"Boys!" cried Billy, "did any of you ever see this thing before?"

In chorus they said they had not.

"Then, by jing! one thing is sure. It was left by the robbers! Why did they do it? What is this thing? Why is it here?"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN HANDCUFFS.

Nobody could answer these questions, but Billy Bowers was thoroughly in earnest, and he went on quickly:

"There is a meaning to this image. I'll almost take my oath it wasn't here when evening began. The robbers left it. Why? What part does the idol play? Has he done his part, or is it to come? It rolls its evil eyes—it breathes! Why is this?"

"I wouldn't have believed such a

thing," remarked Benny Eager. "How can a lifeless statue breathe?"

"That I don't know, but we've got to believe that it does—the proof is right here."

Billy suddenly set the image on the shelf.

"The eyes stop rolling," he added. "Yes, and I don't hear the gentle breathing any more—no, and I can feel no breath on my hand. Well, this is most remarkable. Boys, find the owner of this thing and you will have the robber!"

"But why should any robber leave it here?"

"I don't know that. It seems to point to some foreigner as the thief. Has anybody seen such a man around the boathouse?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"Now that I think of it," pursued Billy, "I saw a rough, hard-looking citizen around here, just before dark. He appeared to be either American, English, or Irish, but he was tough. He seemed to eye this place suspiciously. Wonder where he is now?"

Just then one of the absent members of the club rushed into the building in a state of considerable excitement.

"They've got two men under arrest over at the station!" he cried.

"Have they got the money?" demanded Billy.

"I understand not."

"Is one of them Dan Sherrill?"

"No."

"I should say not. Who the dickens are they?"

"Don't know. They were found over in the vacant lot near Packler's coalshed. They were in a muss—regular scrap—and the officer who found them arrested both under suspicion. You see, this was before the robbery here was discovered, and he thought they had designs on the old factory. One of them showed fight, but the officer knocked him down and ironed him. Now that this robbery is on, the police are holding them on suspicion of their having been in it."

"I'm going over to see them!" exclaimed Billy.

He started, and Benny Eager ran to his side.

"I'm going with you."

"Come along."

"What do you think of it, Billy?"

"I want to see if either is the fellow I saw skulking around here to-night."

The two boys had nearly reached the station when Benny exclaimed:

"Say! you've brought your club along with you."

"So I have," replied Bowers, with a laugh. "Yes, and I've got my policeman's uniform on, just as I wore it in the play! Never mind. It won't hurt anybody, I reckon. Here we are!"

They entered the station, and Billy pushed forward with eagerness, Benny at his heels.

"Hi! there they are!" cried the latter.

"The captain at his desk, and a tough-looking chap standing near him. The man has irons on, but his tongue is free, and he seems to be using it fer keeps."

"Well, I should say! Get onter his oration! He talks like a race-horse warming up fer the Suburban."

"Say, that's the man I saw skulking around the boathouse. I'm going to have a word there."

The captain was seated at his ease, and a passive listener just then. His companion was quite as busy talking as the boys had indicated, and a hard-appearing fellow he was.

The leader of the new-comers forgot everything but his interest in the robbery,

and, allowing his suspicions full sway, he stalked up to the stranger and clapped his hand upon his shoulder.

The conversation was interrupted.

"Say, you!" exclaimed Billy Bowers, "you are my prisoner. Give up, for I mean business!"

The stranger had looked around with sullen surprise, while the police captain half-started up from his chair. He was even more astonished, for before him he saw a boy of eighteen years dressed in an elaborate policeman's uniform.

Such sights were not common, and he did not understand it. For that matter, neither did the stranger.

"What's all this?" demanded the officer. "Who the dickens are you, boy?"

"I'm Billy Bowers," was the prompt answer, "and I guess the law wants this fellow!"

"Go ter thunder!" growled the handcuffed man, in surly defiance.

"But why are you dressed that way?" added the captain.

Billy looked down at his attire. He was still equipped as for the evening play, and in his hand he carried the billy he had there used.

The situation impressed him so that he laughed for a moment, but quickly grew serious again.

"Is this the man who robbed the Bald Eagle Boat-Club?" he asked.

"Bless me, not that I know of."

"He was skulking around there, early in the evening."

"Oh! give us a rest!" growled the prisoner. "The cop has dropped that, so don't you bring up no nonsense."

"Let us be clear on this point," directed the officer. "Explain the full situation, boy."

Billy was not unwilling, and the captain was soon in possession of the facts as to why he was thus dressed and his grounds for suspicion against the man by the desk.

"Sorry to blast your theory," replied the officer, "but there is nothing in it. This man—he gives the name of Dick Turk—was not the robber—"

"Sure not!" interrupted Turk; "I ain't got fifty cents ter my name, by jing!"

"That proves nothing," retorted Billy. "There has been time enough for you to get rid of your plunder."

"Should I have been mousin' around them premises still, ef I had been inter the steal?" snapped Turk.

"That is just the point," added the captain. "The man would have got away quickly if he had been guilty. Now, I did suspect him at first, but I was on the wrong track. He has just been telling me about another case that I had once, but which was never fully cleared up. He has explained some very important features, though it is too late to do any good except in the way of my curiosity. He was illustrating with means at hand how another crushed a lock between his hands and made good an entrance—small matter."

"What was he doing in that vacant lot?" demanded Billy, sharply.

"He and a peddler had a row over there. They tried to trade, and got into a quarrel over it. Nothing serious; I shall now release them both."

"But he was skulking around the boat-club just before the robbery, captain."

"Skulking nothin'!" growled Turk. "Ain't I got a right ter live and breathe? Wal, I should remark!"

"Was he in the building?" asked the officer.

"I didn't watch to see."

"I know of no reason to suspect him."

Turn your attention to missing Dan Sherrill. That's what I have ordered my men to do."

"Captain, Dan never did that."

"No?"

"He is an honest man."

"Then where is he now?"

"Well, I don't—you see—I don't just know."

"I should say not. Honest man, eh? Then why didn't he stay and guard the money he had taken in?"

Billy's confident manner had disappeared. He looked uneasy and worried. For the first time the full significance of Dan Sherrill's disappearance dawned upon him.

"Captain, there is something strange about all this—very strange. I can't grasp it, but I feel sure Dan is innocent."

"Miracles don't happen this generation. If he is innocent, tell me how he got out of sight so strangely. Could evilly disposed men take him from that office so mysteriously? How could they do it?"

"I admit that I can't understand it. 'Tis all an ugly mystery."

"Not to Dan Sherrill. Have you more to say, boy?"

"No," sadly acknowledged Billy.

"All right, you can go."

The dismissal was kind, but it was meant, and Billy walked slowly out. He had forgotten Benny Eager, but his ally's voice sounded by his side.

"Kinder got left, didn't we, Billy?" he muttered.

"Ben, do you believe him guilty?"

"Not by a jugful!" sharply declared the other boy.

"Neither do I, and, by jing! I won't! Let the police mousey around on a wrong scent, if they will. You and I won't do that. Ben, let's do some scouting on our own hook. Let's run the guilty ones down!"

"Done!" cried Benny. "Here's my hand. Let's begin scoutin' now!"

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING EVENT.

Shortly after this the two boys reappeared at the boathouse. Nothing had been learned of the robbery during their absence. Those who had come to see the play had returned to their homes, and nobody was left except a score of the more active members.

They were a gloomy-looking lot of young men. They had very much needed money for the summer campaign on the East River. For a brief space this money was in their grasp, but now it was all gone, and their financial difficulties unprovided for.

They were bitter against Dan Sherrill, and few ventured the opinion that he was being misjudged. Still, it was a great surprise if he was guilty.

Sherrill was not a boy, like the rest of them. He was of at least middle age, and it was because of his age, supposed honesty, and ability that he had been ticket-taker for the club ever since they began business as boatmen in New York.

His public history was well known.

He had once been a stevedore, and had risen until he had charge of gangs of men. One day when Pollock, Oliver & Co., the well-known warehouse men, were having goods transferred to an ocean-bound steamer a bale fell upon Sherrill and injured him for life. After that he never was able to do any heavy work.

Abram Oliver, of the firm, a man of great benevolence and goodness, had given Sherrill a position in the ware-

house with the nominal duties of watching during the day to see that no accidental fire broke out and gained headway in the building. It was what the east siders termed a "soft snap," for there was no real work connected with it. Practically, it was only a device to give support to Sherrill without offering it under the guise of charity.

Some years after Abram Oliver died, his son succeeded to his place in the firm, but with the pledge that he would look after Sherrill, and the latter had held the position ever since.

With such an easy berth, Sherrill had opportunity to do a little more, and it was this that had brought him into the association with the boat-club.

With them, as with all others, he had been regarded as the soul of honesty.

Now, those who thought him guilty were perplexed, while those who had faith in him looked upon his disappearance as little short of unnaturally mysterious.

Billy Bowers had other plans, and he did not linger long with the party. Making a signal to Benny Eager, the two started off, when Billy's gaze happened to fall on the green idol, which was standing on the shelf.

"What's going to be done with that thing?" he asked.

"Pitch it into the street," suggested a fellow-member.

"Yes, we don't want that fiendish old man of crockery mouthing at us," added another.

"Give it to me, will you?" suggested Billy. "I'll take it home and keep it safe."

He had looked at the captain of the boat-club as he spoke, and that person readily answered:

"Take it along."

Somehow, the green idol exercised a peculiar influence over him, and he wanted to see more of it, to know more of it. The hideous creature gave him unpleasant sensations when he looked at it, but he did not fear the crockery imp.

With it under his arm, he and Benny left the building.

It so happened that Billy's rival, Peter Brison, saw them coming, so he stepped into a doorway, and stood there unseen while they passed by. Close to where he was an alley opened from the street, and they had hardly gone past when two men came hastily out of the recess.

"They've got the Man of Death, sure!" exclaimed one.

"Shall we try to get it?" asked his companion.

"Why should we? What do we want of it? Better keep still."

"And let the Man of Death do his work?"

"Yes."

"Ruin follows where he breathes. That kid is going to take him home, maybe. It will be the boy's death—the green man will send him out of the world."

"It will be accidental."

"But the boy looks to be a decent fellow."

"Then it is his ill luck that he has got the Man of Death. We are not to blame—fate has willed it so. We can't risk exposure to save somebody we don't even know. The idol will have to do its work. That boy in policeman's clothes will be in his grave before grass grows this spring!"

With this the speaker turned away and walked down the street. His companion followed, and Peter Brison was left alone.

Peter looked after Billy, and took two

quick steps that way. Then he stopped short and an ugly look came to his face.

"No!" he muttered. "I won't do it. I hate Bill Bowers! This is a good time to get rid of him. Whatever the Man of Death is, I'll let him do his work!"

And Peter took to a side-street and abandoned the good intention that for an instant had moved him.

Billy carried the idol home, set it on the mantel, and proceeded to change his clothes. Benny sat by and watched him.

"Do you think we shall learn anything to-night?" asked Benny.

"All I can say is, we will scout," was answered.

"Jest my size, William! I've always wanted ter do some fine biz in the detective line, an' here's the chance. I'm sorry poor old Dan gives me the show, but now it's so I shall improve the opportunity. I'll be a private, an' you leader. Ready, captain?"

"Yes, all ready, Detective Ben."

"Goin' ter leave the green idol here?"

"Of course."

"Ugh! I wouldn't want it in my room. Say, that feller looks jest like a demon! See him roll his stony old eyes! He's breathin' again, too. I wonder why he does that some o' the time an' not all?"

"Maybe I can tell you later on. I'm going to keep the green man right there and have him for a companion."

"You don't suppose there is any harm in him, do ye?"

"What harm can there be?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I. Come, let's be off on our scout!"

Leaving the house, they proceeded to carry out their plan. It was not an elaborate one. Dan Sherrill was known to nearly everybody in that ward. For years, and ever since his accident, the sight of his bent form and limping step had made him noticeable, and his long residence and popularity had done the rest.

The Street Scouts argued that if anybody had seen Dan go away it would be remembered, so they intended to pass along the various thoroughfares between there and Dan's own humble home and ask if he had been seen.

At that hour there were not so very many people abroad, but those who were belonged to the class that kept their eyes open.

"Haven't you any theory, Captain Billy?" asked the junior member of the slum scouts.

"I must say I haven't, so far. It is all a mystery. Say, won't it fall heavily on Dan's wife and granddaughter? It will near kill them, I do believe. The disgrace will hit hard."

"Poor old Dan!"

"It doesn't seem that he could be kidnapped right near his friends, but, if not—how did he go?"

"Wal, they say he run off with the money."

"I won't believe it—I won't! Still, I'm going to inquire into Dan's financial affairs and see if he was any ways hard up for money."

The scouts pressed on, and, as they went, people were asked about the missing man, but not one had seen him since he went to the boat-house.

Finally, they reached Dan's own home. It was a part of a tenement house. The building was old and poor, but it had been kept neat and clean, inside and out. No slovenly people lived in that building.

The windows of Dan's part were not visible from the street.

"Be you goin' in, Captain Billy?"

"I suppose they are waiting for Dan."

Unless somebody has told them it will be an unpleasant job. I hesitate to take it upon myself."

"Let's hang around awhile and watch."

"Just my notion."

For awhile all seemed peaceful and safe around them; then Billy suddenly found himself seized from behind in a strong grasp, and, an instant later, some woolen object was flung over his head. Light disappeared from his view. He struggled, but was held fast.

"Hit him with the club if he resists!" cried a harsh voice.

Billy fought like a young tiger, but, though not hit with a club, or anything else, his efforts were useless.

The blanket, or whatever enwrapped him, was drawn closer, and he felt the pressure of a rope. Soon he was tied securely.

This done, he was bundled into a carriage, and the vehicle went bouncing along over the rough pavement.

He knew that other persons were in the carriage—how many he could not tell, nor who they were. In fact, it was all he could do to get his breath through the blanket.

For a mile, it seemed, this rapid drive was kept up.

"It all comes along of Dan Sherrill's case!" he thought. "They are going to do me up, too. The gang in this game is just desperate enough to kill me. Yes, that's what they mean! It's a bigger case than I thought."

Yet, William Edward Bowers had good nerves, and was strikingly cool in the face of danger.

There came a sudden jerk of the vehicle that sent Billy rolling against the side of the carriage with considerable violence. The speed of the horse had been greatly increased.

"Running away, I do believe!" Billy thought.

On, on, on, a few rods further; then the vehicle almost tipped over as it bounced along. It surely was rough going, unlike any street.

"Where the dickens are we?" Billy wondered. "Hullo! we're falling! What! a big splash! Jingo! we're in the river!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BIG SHIP BY THE PIER.

Billy had solved this much of the mystery: The sudden start of the horse, and increase of speed, the sudden roughness of the way, the fall, the inrush of water—all indicated that the horse had run away, taken to a pier and plunged into the East River.

And Billy Bowers, tied closely in the blanket, utterly unable to do a thing to save himself, was it all over for him?

"I shall be drowned!" he felt assured.

There had been wild movements and wilder cries around him for a moment. The cries ceased, but what followed was much as if a collection of animals were struggling madly with each other.

The struggle was mad enough, but it was one for life.

While the others fought for life, Billy could do nothing to save himself. His bonds held tight.

Between the muffling of the blanket and the water he found all breath cut off. He gasped painfully. He was conscious that the horse was still in motion, swimming, of course, but that meant nothing to him.

The end was near. A little more time and nature would yield. A sense of confusion and weakening of mental grasp came over him. Then there was a little reaction as he floated somewhere—float-ed, instead of being held down by the frame of the carriage.

He knew he had been dislodged from that vehicle, but it did not seem to mean much to him. He was still bound.

Bewildered as he was, he was still conscious, however, of that feeling of floating—up, up, up somewhere, he knew not where.

"I'm dying!" he thought.

Suddenly there was a tremendous change. Light streamed into his eyes—air struck his tortured lungs.

He was on the surface of the river, free from the blanket, and with the stars visibly gleaming above him!

He drank in the air with great gasps and seemed to come back from the borderland of death!

His mind quickly reasserted itself; he used his eyes; he discovered that he was being borne along by somebody who was not clearly visible as he swam under the burden of Billy's weight!

A pier was reached, and Billy was raised a little.

"Kin you swim?" asked a faint voice below him.

The Street Scout started. It was the voice of Benny Eager!

Benny—brave Benny! He it was who was acting the rescuer! At once Billy was alert. He realized that the removal of the blanket had left his hands free, and that he could do for himself.

He reached out and grasped the pier. "Hold fast, cap!" directed Benny. "I'll give you a boost."

The boost was given, and Billy gained the top of the pier. Then he reached down to aid his ally, and both soon stood safe on the stringpiece.

"Wal, by jing!" exclaimed Benny.

"Are you done up?" asked Billy, anxiously.

"Me? Wal, I should say it was you that's liable fer ter be that way. Say, be ye drowned?"

"I was, but I'm out of it now. Benny, give us your hand!"

"There's my flipper!"

They clasped hands with warmth. It was like welcoming a friend back from the grave.

"I don't understand this at all," added Billy.

"Oh! they didn't tie me up so tight as they did you. I got the ropes off, so when we jumped inter the drink I was all ready fer the little sociable. I jest looked out fer you an' swum my purtiest."

"You were in the carriage, too?"

"Sure as salt mackerel!"

"Where are the men now?"

"By jing! I had forgotten them!"

Benny ran to the front of the pier and looked out earnestly.

"Men, horse, and carriage all seem to have disappeared," he said.

"Drowned, maybe."

"I dunno, I dunno!" replied Benny, solemnly. "Sech measly rascals don't drown easily. Say, Captain Billy, who was they, anyhow?"

"Don't know, and can't guess just why they did it."

"That's it—why? W'ot heve we done fer get them down onter us?"

"Cap, kin it be because we've pledged to help Dan Sherrill?"

The boys faced each other on the pier and looked as closely as they could in the dim light. It was an unanswerable question. Neither of them had had a view of their abductors, and neither had a personal enemy that was likely to do such a thing. There was no accounting for the attack except by surmising that it had come because of their stand in behalf of Dan Sherrill.

"How did you get loose, Benny?" asked the leader.

"Oh, I slipped the ropes when the wagon jolted so bad. I got free, an', when we tumbled inter the drink, I first got loose from the wagon an' then seen ter you."

"If you hadn't, I should be gone up now."

"Fact; or, ruther, gone down. Them was desperate fellers."

The puzzled scouts now left their position and made a search to see if they could tell what had become of men and horses, but, failing utterly, they wended their way homeward.

Their course was along the waterfront. Out beyond, the river flowed with soft, silent power, while nearer, the ships that were in port rested at their docks.

They had been walking for several minutes, when Captain Billy suddenly grasped his ally's arm.

"Eh? W'ot is it?" asked Benny.

"Keep mum!"

Billy's gaze was fixed upon a man who was passing, and Benny discerned a rough and evil-looking night-walker, who soon turned and passed out on a pier.

"W'ot is it?" Benny repeated. "Who's he?"

"His clothes are as wet as ours!"

"You don't say! By jing! then he's one of our enemies!"

"Just my notion, Benny. He has gone out there to that big vessel, but he didn't look like a sailor, and he surely wasn't dressed like one. What do you make of the vessel?"

"Looks like a merchant ship."

"Yes, and it's a bouncer. One of the biggest I ever saw. I want to learn what she is."

So they also passed out on the pier and made out the name of the craft.

"The Rolling Rock!" muttered Billy.

"Say, ain't she an East Indiaman?"

"Is she?"

"That's my recollection. I'm sure I've heard o' her before."

"Humph! Well, what is the wet man doing around her? I think I can see more men on the further end of the pier. Say, I'm going that way to investigate. We're onto something, or I miss my guess."

Billy took to the south side of the pier, and, followed by Benny, sneaked along. The pier was littered with various things, and plentiful cover was thus given them.

They advanced near to the group, to discover that four men composed it. They were talking earnestly.

"It's risky," muttered Billy, "but I want to get nearer. Notice that box just this side of them? Well, I'm going to crawl there."

"It's the way ter do solid biz. Move on, cap; I'll hang ter your skirts!"

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN BILLY HITS HARD.

Down on hands and knees sunk the Street Scouts, and at once crawled forward, and soon both gained the cover of the box. It was a place of peril to the shadowers, but it was, all the same, the spot to hold to.

The four men were now plainly revealed, for there was light enough to size them up quite well.

"Three of them are drippin' with water!" whispered Benny.

"Yes. Tough-looking gang, too. And, hi! Our old friend, Dick Turk, is one of them! Now, then, I reckon I didn't guess so very wild when I told the police captain that Turk was a bad man, and into this game."

"The fourth man is very different."

"Well, I should say! Looks like a Fifth Avenue millionaire."

"W'ot is he doin' with them crooks?"

"He must be the one that set them on—bah!"

It was an exclamation of disgust, because the shadowed four now moved closer to the Rolling Rock.

"We can't hear them talk!" muttered Benny, in chagrin.

"Not a word. Let's watch, though."

"They're goin' aboard."

"Yes. Sure sign that they have some understanding with those on the Rolling Rock."

"Somebody meets them by the gangplank."

"Looks as if he might be the captain."

"They all hob-nob together like friends. Now, if this is the gang that tried to do us up, what about the vessel?"

The scouts could not answer, but the whole matter was assuming very interesting conditions, certainly.

The four disappeared, and half an hour had elapsed, when a solitary man appeared and came down the gangplank.

"Dick Turk!" murmured Billy.

The tough-looking citizen reached the pier.

"W'ot will he do now?" asked Benny. The question was speedily answered.

Turk began to hunt for something. He bent his gaze upon the flooring of the pier and advanced directly toward them.

"Danger!" whispered the captain.

"He will see us, sure!"

Nearer approached the man, until only the box separated him from the boys.

"If he sees us, fight and run!" directed Billy.

Dick reached the box and ran his hand over its top. The scouts hardly ventured to breathe. They were not so very much in awe of Dick, big as he was, but they did not want it to be known they were spying on the ship and its people.

"Hang it!" muttered Dick, "what did I do with the thing?"

He passed around the box, thus reaching the scouts, and only a recoil on his part kept him from falling over them.

"Hello! what's this?" he cried, in surprise.

Captain Billy had been doing some thinking, and the result was he now shot forward with lowered head, aimed for Dick's stomach, and it struck the mark. Dick was hit squarely, and tumbled over like a tenpin. One moment he was up; the next, he was rolling about in a haphazard way.

"Skip!" cried Billy to his pard, and the boy spies dashed away toward the street at full speed.

On the opposite side of the street they halted in the deepest shadows and looked back. Turk was just getting up, but was moving with slow and uncertain progress. Once on his feet, he pressed his hand to his stomach and stood still.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Benny. "He's got a pain inter his bread-basket. You bunted him fer keeps, cap! It was a sockdolager!"

"Do you think he recognized me?"

"Not much! You didn't give him time."

"Just my notion. I gave him something to remember me by, though."

"He makes fer ther ship, an' his hand still caresses his corpus. Oh, that was a boss lick, Cap'n Billy!" and Benny chuckled delightedly.

"We will wait awhile longer and see if we can do more. Say, yonder comes a sailor. I'm going to ask him about the vessel."

The Jack Tar approached, and Billy

accosted the man. He talked of other things first, but the important question was finally asked.

"What ship?" replied the son of Neptune. "Oh! that's the Rolling Rock, a merchantman. She plies between here and Calcutta."

"Who sails her?"

"Old Sime Leechings is captain, but he don't own her, of course. She belongs to Pollock, Oliver & Co."

Whew! Captain Billy's eyes twinkled. The firm named had been the employers of Dan Sherrill for years! It was in their warehouse that the missing man had served so long! Somewhere in all this—Billy could not guess where—lay a mystery; he was sure of that now. It was a new complication.

Why had the dripping men made for the Rolling Rock as soon as they were free from the immersed carriage?

"Would she be a good ship to sail on, for a boy?" added Billy.

"Now, see here!" advised the sailor, "don't you think of goin' to sea. It's a hard life, an' one that don't leave a man a cent for his old age. Keep out of it! Still, since you've asked the question, I'll answer it. Pollock, Oliver & Co. are the best men in their business, and they fit up their ships in fine style. No lack of comfort on any o' them—except when Captain Leechings gets on a tear. He is a hot-tempered old fellow, Leechings is, and not averse to doin' bodily mischief ter a Jack Tar when he gets his mad up."

"Is he honest?"

"Bless me, I don't know. Honesty don't cut any figure between sailor and captain."

There was a movement on the pier, and a single man came toward them.

"Ah! there's Mr. Pollock, of the firm, now!" added the sailor.

Right from the Rolling Rock came the ship-owner, and the boy scouts were uncertain whether to stand their ground or run away. Pollock settled that point for them by starting off on the east side of the street, thus neither coming near them nor seeing them.

The sailor was bound for somewhere in the opposite direction, and he proceeded on his way, so the scouts were left to themselves.

"Well, it looks to me as if there was a big nigger in the woodpile!" exclaimed Billy. "The head of the firm of which Dan was an employe here with the men who tried to do us up. That's one to go on, sure enough!"

"Wot can it mean, cap?"

"Has Pollock made off with Dan?"

"Why the dickens should he? Yes, an' why should he rob our small theatrical fund? Pollock must be rich as mud. What would our stolen money be to him? Only a bite!"

"I can't help that, but you can't tell me it was chance that brought yonder party all here at once. I am now dead suspicious of Pollock, but I don't see the explanation of the business yet."

"If there is one we'll find it out!" averred Benny, with enthusiasm. "We will keep on scoutin'. We've made a stavin' beginnin', an' we'll do so some more, by jing! Captain Billy, these here Street Scouts are goin' ter make old-timers open their lamps wider than ever before. Bet yer bicycle stockin's on that!"

"Just that, Benjamin! We will stick, and we'll find the explanation of the mystery, or know the reason why. Now, let's go home and get some sleep. We want to be fresh to-morrow. Here's for home!"

They went. In due time Captain Billy

was in his private room. Almost the first thing he noticed was the green idol.

"That's a mighty queer thing!" he murmured. "Ugh! what a fiendish expression on the old imp's face! He gives me the shivers. If he was a living man I wouldn't go within a mile of him. Oh! you tough-looking, sneering, eye-rolling old pirate!"

He went up to the idol and took it down. It had seemed to be in a quiescent state, but now a soft, purring sound arose. Billy placed the green man close to his ear, and he could both hear the "breathing" distinctly and feel the wind come from the image's mouth.

It was very strange, but he had little time to waste on it. He undressed and went to bed. The idol remained on the mantel.

Perhaps it would have been broken into a thousand fragments had Billy known its name—the Man of Death!

CHAPTER VI.

A SERIOUS CHARGE.

The next morning Billy Bowers's first thought was of the robbery and the adventures that had followed, and he lay considering matters, when he chanced to notice the green idol.

It was on the mantel, and as he looked Billy saw its eyes rolling in a most unpleasant way.

"Jingo! I can't stand that!" he exclaimed. "The confounded thing gives me cold shivers!" and he sprang from his bed.

He turned the green crockery face to the wall before he proceeded to dress. After that he had breakfast, and had barely finished when Benny Eager put in an appearance.

The scouts consulted and arranged a plan for the day.

Benny was to go to Dan Sherrill's home, see his wife and granddaughter, and learn all they knew or could suggest, while Billy took it upon himself to investigate Mr. Pollock, the rich ship-owner.

Each went his way, and the leader was soon in the neighborhood of the warehouse. It was an imposing building, with the name of the firm over the lower windows in big letters.

It was not hard to find somebody who knew them well.

"Fine old business house," Billy was told. "It was started by Anthony Pollock and Abram Oliver. The latter is dead, but has been succeeded by his son Alden; so the firm name remains unchanged."

"What sort of men are they?" inquired Billy.

"The very best. There never was a better man than Abram Oliver, and his son is off of the same piece. Anthony Pollock is different from the Olivers—not so genial and frank, but he has a long record for honor and business probity. I hear that Pollock thinks of retiring. He is about seventy years old, and it's time for him to take life easy."

"They own vessels, do they?"

"Yes; own several merchant vessels of the old-time pattern. All the while they are doing business here their ships are sweeping the ocean."

"Know any of the captains?"

"No."

"How about the man who was day-watchman here, who is said to have stolen money last night from a boat-club?"

"So you've heard of that? I understand that Pollock is all broke up over it. He says he would have staked his life on Dan Sherrill's honesty, and he shall leave his situation open until Dan

is arrested and has made a confession. You see, he don't believe Dan is guilty."

"And Alden Oliver?"

"Approves of the senior partner's views, I am told."

It was all that Billy could learn, and it did not harmonize with his suspicions. He had hoped to find that Anthony Pollock was a known rascal of the worst sort—that would fit into his theory. He had heard quite a different account.

He went away with a feeling of disappointment.

"I haven't got on much, but maybe Benny will do better. It isn't time to meet him yet, so I will cruise around a bit. I kind of want a look at the Rolling Rock, and I think I'll go down that way. I'm not thinking of going as a sailor, though—not until certain things I've seen there are explained. There was a meaning to—hullo!"

Billy was suddenly accosted by a man who had come out of an alley. This man smiled and nodded, and held out a paper to the scout with divers motions and contortions of the face.

The New York boy was slow to take the paper, and looked fixedly at the man, who, though dressed in New York fashion, was evidently a foreigner; his swarthy face proclaimed that.

It was not an engaging face, either, and Captain Billy mentally decided to have nothing to do with him.

The man grunted and spoke in a strange tongue, and, thus solicited, the scout took the paper. It was soiled and rough, but he saw a few words written on it, and this was what he read:

"Somebody who can speak English, come—come quick!"—a brief message, but certainly interesting.

"Who is he, and what is wanted?" demanded the Boy Scout.

"Ugh, ugh!" grunted the stranger, and then he pointed to the alley.

Captain Billy looked, to behold a very crooked way and brick houses on both sides. The walls bowed in and out so erratically that to see between them to the end of the alley was out of the question.

"Sick!—hurt!" muttered the messenger, in execrable English. The scout's recent experiences had made him wary, but common humanity commanded him to go to the relief of the "seeck" person. It could be no more than a genuine call for help in necessity.

So he moved toward the alley, and motioned to the stranger to lead the way.

The man complied with alacrity, and they passed between the crazy walls and neared the end of the alley. That point reached, Billy saw an ordinary sort of back-yard. Nobody was visible there.

"Where's the sick chap?" and Billy paused as he asked the question, and at the moment, hearing a rustling sound back of him, he turned his head quickly.

What he saw gave him a shock. A man stood there—not a sick man, by any means, and over his head he was swinging a cord of peculiar pattern.

The wildly gleaming eyes left no doubt of his intentions—to fling the cord over Billy's head—in fact, to lasso him.

"Trapped!"

The thought flashed upon the boy scout, and with it he leaped aside, and thus escaped the loop, but found himself in a tight place. Hemmed in between the two men, he must fight both, for he could no longer doubt that he was marked for their victim.

They advanced upon him together.

"Keep off!" exclaimed Billy.

"American boy die!" retorted one.

"American boy won't do anything of

the sort!" cried the plucky scout. "Keep off, I say!"

They were closing in on him, and the man who had lured him drew a knife. It was of a peculiar shape, but keen and dangerous of look.

Billy had no weapon, but his ingenuity was equal to the danger. The ground was littered with broken bricks, and, picking up two of the "bats," he was ready for action.

"Out of the way!" he cried, and as he shouted he hurled a bat at the man with the rope.

His aim was true; the half brick found its mark; the thug tumbled over and lay flat on the ground.

With a cry of rage and consternation, the other scoundrel leaped toward the scout. His knife was raised above his head; he meant to do quick and deadly execution.

"Some other time!" called out the undaunted Billy, mockingly.

With this he leaped forward toward safety. The fallen man clutched at him as he passed, but Billy kicked his arm away and bounded out of the alley.

Wrought up with anger and indignation, he was eager for satisfaction.

"I'll have a policeman after them!" he cried.

He looked for one, but none was in sight. He hastened off at a venture, still looking, but had gone only a few steps when he met a man in plain clothes, who checked him sharply.

"Wait a bit!"

The call was so peremptory that Billy halted. The man was fairly well dressed, but seemed to be a common kind of a person, and the leader of the Street Scouts decided that he wanted nothing of him.

"Haven't time!" he curtly responded.

"You will have to take time!"

It was not an agreeable address, but he caught sight of a second person who had lingered behind the man who had halted him.

The second person was Billy's old enemy, Peter Brison!

Peter Brison! What was he doing there? and his face bore an expression of mingled ill will and triumph.

What did it mean?

"Say," added the man in plain clothes, "do you know who I am?"

"No, and I don't care a rap!" retorted the irate scout.

"I'll bet a dollar you do. I am Detective John Morlock, at your service. I say that to be polite. Really, I am not at your service—you are at mine."

"What have I to do with this?"

"I arrest you, William E. Bowers!"

"For what?" cried Billy.

"Robbing the Bald Eagle Boat-Club!"

The scout struggled between bewilderment and unbelief, but, as he again caught sight of Peter Brison's malevolent face, he realized that it was no joke—that Morlock was really after him.

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY RESISTS ARREST.

"Well, this is a corker!" exclaimed the Street Scout, now hot with indignation.

"Say!" he added, "why do you want to arrest me?"

"For robbing the Bald Eagle Boat-Club," replied Morlock.

"You said that before; that's old. What's your proof?"

"You were Dan Sherrill's ally. You and he did the job. You kept near while he run off with the plunder."

"Why, you blockhead!" exclaimed Billy, "I was on the stage all the while!"

"How about your long wait in Act I., when, in the play, Simpkins tries to rob Deacon Potson's house?"

"Well, I did have a wait there," admitted Billy, "but I wasn't off the stage."

"Can you prove that?"

The scout hesitated. The fact was, he had improved that wait to go to a retired spot and eat a lunch. He had been all alone.

"Your silence is answer enough," pursued Morlock. "You can't prove it. You are guilty. Besides, this boy saw you go down to the ticket-office and speak with Dan Sherrill."

The speaker motioned to Peter Brison, but the remark threw Billy into a new mood. He turned sharply upon Peter.

"Say, do you claim you saw that?" he demanded.

"Sure!" answered Brison.

"Then you lie like a pirate!"

"Enough of this!" sharply added Morlock. "Come along with me!"

Captain Billy wanted no part of a cell, and determined to fight against it as long as possible.

"Where's your warrant?" he demanded.

"Never mind! Come along!"

Morlock advanced, but Billy fell back. "Hold your horses a bit, mister!" he requested. "How do I know you are a detective? Show your badge."

"Oh! come, now, don't be a fool!" impatiently exclaimed Morlock. "You can make all the kick you wish to the police captain. I have no time to monkey around with you."

"Maybe you think I have time for such monkeying. Say, I don't believe there is any detective to you. You don't look it. Show that badge, or you won't get this chicken. See?"

"I'll take you!"

Morlock moved to execute his threat, but he forgot that he was not one-half as nimble as a boy. Billy easily dodged him.

"Catch him!" he cried to Peter.

"If Pete Brison tries it he will get worse than I've given him before to-day! Will you try, Pete?"

Peter remembered divers "scraps" he had had with his rival in the past, and stood stock still. He looked disposed to do something vicious, but concluded to let Morlock do his own work. That person was willing, but he did not know how.

"Don't you know," he snarled, angrily, "that it goes hard with those who resist an officer?"

"Better drop that side of the question," Billy suggested. "You are no more an officer than your great grandmother is. Say, what is your game, anyhow?"

Morlock made a rush, but the scout dodged again, and the self-styled detective ran past him several paces and then pulled up, puffing painfully.

Peter Brison had been passive, but he now ran forward and whispered something to Morlock. It had immediate effect, and the man turned and walked rapidly away. Peter kept just in advance of him, and they receded at a lively gait.

"Humph!" muttered the scout, "that is a new way to capture a prisoner. Wonder what bit them all of a sudden? Hi! I have it!—there comes a patrolman! They were scared of him."

The explanation looked reasonable. A policeman was moving forward with slow and dignified steps, blissfully unconscious of the fact that he had been too late to see an important event.

Captain Billy had not forgotten the

men who had decoyed him into the alley, but when he looked for them he saw no signs of either. It looked as if, like Morlock, they had seen enough of Billy for the time being. The scout was not certain whether he had seen enough of them or not. The impulse was strong in his mind to speak to the policeman and put a stop to the work of the last hour, but he had another idea.

"If I have them arrested they won't have any chance to show their hand," he mused. "It's a bit dangerous, but I am going to let them simmer. If they want fight I will try to keep up with the procession."

The patrolman passed by with only a casual glance at Captain Billy, and the latter was left free to do as he pleased. He looked at a clock in front of a watch-maker's store.

"I may as well go to meet Benny Eager," he decided; "he may have something to report."

He went accordingly. His course was past the mouth of the alley, and he took a look in, but nothing was to be seen of the swarthy-faced men who had used him so roughly. He was careful not to investigate too closely.

"Those fellows sort of puzzle me," he thought. "Why have they made a try for me, and who the dickens are they, anyhow? They wore New York clothes, but they are foreigners without a dash of Yankee blood. I've seen somebody who had just such faces as they have, but I can't place them—hullo!"

He stopped short and looked triumphant.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, aloud. "I saw men like them in a dime museum. It was claimed they were from India, and that they were what they called stranglers. The lecturer explained that there was a race of men there who used ropes to kill people, and were known as Thugs. Say, ginger! the fellows in the alley tried to lasso me!"

It was a startling combination of ideas, and, though it was hard to believe that any of the darker methods of India could be pursued in New York, Billy lost his nerve for a moment. The Thugs of India were terrible to think of, and they were all the more dangerous because their methods were so secret.

"What of it?" cried Captain Billy, presently. "I guess we've got a police force here, and, now I am warned, I can do a little business on the quiet, myself. I won't worry about them. But why do they want to do me up—those fellows from India?"

A brief pause, and then the significant addition:

"Ah! the ship Rolling Rock plies between here and India!"

Ideas were abundant in Billy's mind then. He had suspected Anthony Pollock before; he suspected him more than ever now. Anthony owned the Rolling Rock. It was strange and suggestive.

Presently the Scout aroused and continued his way. He met Benny Eager as appointed, but his aid's face told of nothing important to communicate.

"What news?" Billy asked.

"Wal, I've seen Dan Sherrill's family."

"Anything come of it?"

"Not a thing."

"Don't they know where Dan is?"

"No, and they are all broke up over it."

"What do they say about the accusation against him?"

"They say it is a lie, by jing!" exclaimed Benny.

"Insist he is innocent, eh?"

"You bet they do. Dan's wife says she has known him all his life, an' that there ain't a dishonest hair in his head."

"How do they account for it, then?"
 "They can't account fer it, but they say he is the victim of some terrible plot."

"Just my notion."

"They think he is dead."

"I hope that isn't so."

"Me, too, but it does look bad fer Dan."

"Benny, I can't understand it. If all this trouble was made by Anthony Pollock, why has he done it? Why should he want our miserable little theater fund to add to his great riches?"

"Maybe he ain't as rich as folks say."

"He must be. It can't have been money, I guess. But then there is Dan Sherrill. I wonder if he had a grudge against Dan?"

"If that was it, why should he steal our theater money?"

Captain Billy kicked the sidewalk viciously, as if seeking an idea there. Presently his face brightened up.

"The only theory I can think of that will hold water," he replied, "is that Dan knew something about Pollock that was dangerous to the rich man."

"Say, you've got it!" cried Benny.

"Maybe I have, but there is more to get. Come, Benny, we must be moving. I want another look at the Rolling Rock. Let's go down that way at once and see what's going on."

"I'm with ye. Hustle!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY BEARDS THE TIGER.

When the Street Scouts arrived at the pier the Rolling Rock was lying as on the previous night. The ship looked even more impressive than by the former light, causing Benny to remark:

"Say, she's a bouncer, an' a mighty smart sort of a craft."

"They are not at work on the cargo now," replied Captain Billy.

"No. Don't seem ter be many men around her. Some o' the sailors are loungin' around on deck, an' on the pier, but that is all."

"There don't seem to be much for us to see or hear."

"Not if we stand here."

"What else can we do?"

"We might walk right up there an' talk with them."

"That would show ourselves to them plainly."

"Why not? We can't get onto their curves by keepin' back here, can we? Let's go right there, Billy."

It was a bold idea, but, the more the leader of the Scouts thought about it the more he was inclined to risk the step. Something important might come of it, and there did not seem to be much to be gained by standing where they were.

A plan was formed, and then they moved forward openly. Two sailors were on the pier, lounging on a box, and to them the boys went at once. Glances of idle curiosity were leveled upon them.

"Hallo, messmates!" bluffly greeted Captain Billy.

"Hallo youngsters!" one of the tars replied, genially.

"Taking an airing?"

"Just a trifle."

"Do you belong to this ship?"

"We do, my young friend."

"She goes to India, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Can we get a chance?"

"As sailors?"

"Yes."

"Now, see here! Let me give you a word of advice at the start. Don't try to be a sea-dog. There's more trouble and danger in it than pleasure or profit."

I know that, an' I've follered the sea fer thirty years. Ain't that so, Tom Briggs?"

"Fact!" replied the second sailor. "You listen ter Jim Hardy, you kids. He's an old hand on the ocean, an' what he don't know ain't worth knowin'."

The advice was seriously given, but it meant nothing to the Scouts. They had no more notion of going to sea than Jim Hardy had of becoming a tailor, but they had to stick to their assumed roles.

They asked more questions, and received all the information they requested about sea life. The Rolling Rock was considered an extra good vessel to sail on. True, there was a drawback in that Captain Leechings was a hot-tempered man, who occasionally made matters unpleasant for his crew, but the ship was comfortable, and the men were well fed, like all the crews that sailed in Pollock, Oliver & Co.'s ships.

As to the owners, only good words were said, and the Scouts did not seem to be coming on very fast.

Captain Billy was growing ambitious, and he ventured another step. He said he wanted to go on board, and when he had argued the case a few minutes he was accommodated. Jim Hardy agreed to act as guide, and the two boys followed him to the deck.

As they passed up the gang-plank Benny had a chance to whisper to his friend.

"Say, w'ot ef Pollock, or some o' the rest o' them are here?"

"Then we may get into a confounded mess!" replied Billy.

There was no time to say more, and Jim led on to take them below. This was about to be done when another sailor accosted Jim.

"Better not," he advised.

"Why?"

"Old Sime is on a tantrum!"

"Ah! that changes it!" Jim promptly replied.

The Scouts did not know exactly what this meant, but it was clear that Jim Hardy did. He hesitated for a moment, and then turned to his charges.

"Boys," he added, "you will have ter keep out fer now. When Cap. Leechings is mad we all lay low. Maybe you kin go below some other day; we don't sail for a week yet. Alf, what's the matter with Old Sime?"

"I dunno. He ain't been hisself fer a day or two. You see, Mr. Pollock was aboard a few days ago, an' he must have made Old Sime mad over somethin'. The tantrum has been comin' on ever sence."

"I thought I seen signs of it, but he had a tantrum only a short time ago, an' another wasn't due yet. I s'pose he is makin' things howl down there?"

"He ain't done much yet—nothin' only licked the cabin boy and knocked the cook over the table. He ain't keyed up, yet."

Captain Billy wondered what the other captain was when fully "keyed up," if he was given to such things in his calmer moments. At that moment, however, a scared-looking negro appeared from below. He looked first at Jim Hardy, and then at the visitors.

"De cap'n, he wants a boy ter send on a errant," he remarked.

Benny Eager retreated a pace. With things done on such a plan on the Rolling Rock, perhaps he would be compelled to face this terrible tar, whether he wanted to or not. Benny almost lost his breath when he saw what came next. Billy stepped forward boldly.

"Where is the boy to go to?" he asked, coolly.

"Deed, only de cap'n, he knows dat."

"Does he want to see the boy?"

"Yes."

"Im just his huckleberry."

Benny caught at his ally's coat.

"Say, Billy, don't you do it!" he implored. "You will get yer last sickness if ye do."

The leader of the Scouts pulled away from his well-meaning friend and waved his hand to the colored man.

"Lead on!" he directed.

They went, leaving Benny fairly shivering. Benny was only fifteen years old, and he had not the systematic courage of his older ally. As he stood there, he looked earnestly at Billy, until the latter disappeared from view. His expression was very serious.

"It's all a scheme ter do him up!" was Benny's thought. "Of course, they know who he is, an' they have lured him down on purpose. It will be the last time I shall see him alive, but I want ter be at his funeral, an' it won't do fer me ter git nabbed. I'll stay until they ask me ter call in the undertaker!"

If any such lugubrious ideas were in Captain Billy's mind, he did not betray the fact. He was not indifferent to the danger nor forgetful of the probability that he was known to be too well informed on certain events not for the good of the schemers, but he meant to fight it out with them.

In the cabin the terrible Captain Leechings was found.

He was of middle age, and a typical sailor. He seemed to have been triple-plated with tan, and, with his red hair and red face, presented a picture striking at all times. Just now that red hair stood up fiercely, and there was a wild glare to his eyes.

The negro seemed to shake with alarm.

"Here's de boy, sah," he announced, tremulously.

"Then get out!"

Thus roared the sea-captain, and he picked up a book and hurled it at his man's head. The latter dodged and retreated, leaving the Scout alone with the dreaded mariner.

He was instantly subjected to a severe scrutiny, but he stood it well. He did not think Old Sime could eat him.

"Who are you?" demanded the captain, still roaring.

"Mike Morgan is my name," answered Billy, coolly.

"Have you brains, or are you a fool?"

"I've got brains enough for any job you want done."

"It's my misfortune to have only fools around me."

"Why do you engage that kind?"

"Because they are born that way and can't help it," was the indirect reply.

"All are fools—cabin boy, cook, mates, sailors—oh! say, what a lonesome world this would be if the fools were all out of it! A man would walk a mile to find another man, and right here in New York, too!"

Billy took the remark as an indication of the mood of the mariner, and did not try to dispute it. He could see very plainly that Old Sime was too hot-tempered to be able to find good in anybody.

The mariner was in mood for talking, and he proceeded to tell in detail what trouble he had with stupid people around him. This was not sending Billy on an errand, but the latter let it go, and kept his place in front of the captain, but on the opposite side of the table.

For awhile the red face and glaring eyes fascinated him so much that he could think of nothing else, but, presently, he grew curious, and began to take in the details of the cabin.

At first there was but little to be seen, but something more was coming. When

Old Sime hurled the book Billy had vaguely noticed that some object dropped out of it and fell to the floor.

It now lay at his own feet, and, as he chanced to see it again he made a remarkable discovery.

The object was an oblong bit of pasteboard of brown color, with printing upon it. Billy started—it was a ticket of the play at the Bald Eagle Theatre!

CHAPTER IX. THE SCOUT IN PERIL.

There was no mistake about it. There lay one of the tickets that had been printed for the play given at the Bald Eagle Club the night that Dan Sherrill disappeared.

Billy Bowers looked in amazement. He did not believe any tickets had been sold except to the personal friends of members of the club, and the question arose—How had this particular ticket got into Captain Leechings' cabin?

The Scout could think of but one explanation.

"It was stolen at the same time the money was taken!" he thought.

Old Sime was still talking, but this could not last forever, and the Scout planned to get the ticket without his step being discovered. After some meditation he evolved the plan.

From his pocket he took his handkerchief, and made a pretense of wiping his face. Then he dropped it to the floor. All this he did so openly that Old Sime could not help seeing him, and then the rest was ready for trial. Billy stopped, lingered a moment, slid the handkerchief deftly over the ticket, and picked them both up together.

He slipped his trophy into his pocket. It was done none too soon, for Leechings was tired of roaring his accusations against his men. He suddenly cooled down.

"I sent for you to do an errand," he explained. "It will bring you in a dollar. Is it a go?"

"Sure!" promptly answered Billy. The mariner fished something out of his pocket.

"I want you to take this letter to—Hullo! what now?"

Footsteps had sounded, and, as Billy followed Old Sime's example and looked around, he saw a man enter the cabin. No sailor he, but an aristocratic-looking person of more than middle age. Nor was this all. He was the well-dressed man Billy had seen around the Rolling Rock the night before, and the man whose identity he believed he had solved. Leechings quickly spoke again.

"Hallo, Pollock!" he exclaimed. "I was just going to send for you."

The Scout had felt sure of it—now he had proof. The man upon whose head he had placed all the blame for the Bald Eagle calamity was before him. That person did not answer Old Sime, nor look at the mariner. Instead, he had stopped short, and was staring at Billy.

The boy's first impression was that he had been hasty in suspecting Pollock. The latter had a smooth, bland face, and with his rich but unostentatious clothes, was one of the last men who would have been taken for a criminal.

Still, Billy thought that, under the velvet surface, he could distinguish something not so smooth and bland, and he lost no part of his suspicions.

Pollock found his tongue. "Who is this?" he asked, in a dissatisfied way.

"A boy I called in to take a letter to you."

"Why did you—ah!—call this particular boy?" asked the rich man, irritably.

"Why not this particular boy?" growled Old Sime.

"Oh! it's all right, only I don't see why you should send for me. I was coming, all the same."

"Then we don't need the youngster any longer. Boy, get out!"

"Stop, stop!" directed Pollock. "I think I may have an errand of my own to be done soon. Let the boy remain; he may be wanted."

The ship-owner was not acting naturally, and Billy knew that he did not feel at ease. He could not seem to keep his gaze off from the Scout's face, and the result was put into silent form by Billy.

"He's a little bit uncertain, but he's my enemy until he knows."

Leechings looked impatient, but he was somewhat cooler in the presence of his employer. His "tantrum" was kept under control.

"Put the boy in a stateroom," added Pollock. "I want to speak with you, and then we will see about the errand."

"Here you are," replied Old Sime. "Come this way, youngster."

Leechings had risen and opened a stateroom door. A comfortable-looking place was revealed beyond, but Billy was not sure he wanted to enter it. For a moment he hesitated; then he remembered that his presence below decks was known, so he concluded that no great harm could come to him.

Deciding to see the matter out, he entered the stateroom, and the captain closed the door.

"Well, now," mused the Scout, "I didn't expect this. Here I am right in the foe's camp, and they are in council. I'd give a good bit to hear what they say, but I should be a fool to try it. With their suspicions aroused, I don't want to open that door an inch. Not for Joseph!"

He took the ticket from his pocket. He had made no mistake, and it grew more and more suggestive. How had that ticket come into the cabin of the Rolling Rock, if it had not been a part of the steal from the Bald Eagle office?

"I'm on the right track; that's dead sure. But how am I to end the case? It is no small job to stack up against anybody as rich and powerful as Anthony Pollock. Still, I've done it, and—wonder if Pollock is preparing to do me up now?"

The silence in the next room was suggestive. Simon Leechings's booming voice was not to be heard, and it was sure proof that the conversation was being made very secret.

Thus far Billy had not paid much attention to his surroundings, but, to relieve the monotony of the long wait, he looked around the place he was in. Its spotless cleanness was marked, but it needed only a brief survey.

"Hallo, what's this?"

Something was hanging on the wall. There was a sort of coat, and over it was a peculiar cord, or rope. Something about that object made Billy shiver.

"By jing! it looks like the thing that fellow in the alley tried to lasso me with. I believe it is either the same, or one just like it. Whew! are those Thugs near?"

He fell into a panic, and surveyed the whole room quickly, but he was alone. When he calmed down he took from the nail both the rope and the coat. The latter was of a sort he had never seen worn in New-York, but the rope interested him most.

Suddenly he flung both away from him.

"Get out of sight, you fiendish thing!"

he exclaimed. "You give me the horrors. I hate to think of your possible history—when I know I am myself marked by the Thugs."

He replaced the rope and coat as he had found them, and was looking out of the stateroom window when the door opened. Pollock appeared to view.

"You can go now," he announced, in an oily voice. "There will be no errand to do."

"All right," cheerfully replied Billy.

He passed out of the stateroom, but, as he did so, his head was suddenly enveloped in a blanket. It was cast over him scientifically, and he was speedily wrapped in a pair of strong arms.

"Hit him!"

He heard the command, even with the blanket in the way. He struggled hard, and then—oblivion followed.

There was nobody to see except the two perpetrators of the deed, but Billy lay flat on the floor, unconscious.

"Hurry!" urged Pollock. "This must be done with a rush."

"A desperate bad job!" growled Leechings. "It's the most miserable I ever did for you, and if we don't swing for it 'twill be a wonder."

"No words! Hasten the work! See! I thrust this pocket-book into his trousers. When he is found drowned it will be sure proof he was a thief. Hasten the work!"

"It's a mad plan, but you are boss. Into the river he goes!"

Old Sime lifted Billy, and bore him away on his shoulder.

CHAPTER X. A DESPERATE DEVICE.

A gasping for breath, a wild struggle with he knew not what, a sense of suffocation—with these feelings Captain Billy came back to life. Oblivion vanished, and he found himself in dire peril. He was in water, but nobody was near to help him, and his end seemed near.

The instinct of self-preservation was strong within him, however, and he knew how to exert his powers. He had been a fine swimmer, and he began to move in keeping with that knowledge before his mind had fully cleared.

Thus it was that he went aimlessly, but, presently, his senses returned in full and he realized where he was.

"Say, this is a bath without my being willing. I've got to hump myself, or I shall get my last sickness."

He was exposed to the full force of the river, but he was not far enough from the piers to make him worry. He swam stoutly, and, in a short time, was out of danger. It was not easy to pull himself up, for he felt strangely weak, but this he did, at last.

Then he lay on the pier, trying to get his strength back.

"I've had a close call, by jingo! As near as I can get at it Pollock hit me on the head and threw me overboard. That's what I call a tough deal. Why did he do it? Well, if the reason isn't plain, what is? He thought I would drown!"

This conviction did much to revive the Scout, who was highly indignant, and, as he was rapidly recovering, he rose to a sitting position.

"There's the Rolling Rock, two piers away. I've made quite a voyage since I left her. Wonder what is going on there now?"

Getting upon his feet he proceeded to look more closely.

"I can see the deck fully. Say, something is going on there. A crowd

stands at one point. I can see Pollock and Old Sime Leechings. Everybody is doing a good deal of talking, and they seem excited. Wonder what it's all about? Hullo!"

Captain Billy looked more eagerly.

"There's Benny. He has something to say. He faces Leechings, and shakes his fist in the old salt's face. Bully for you, Ben! You've got pluck, if you are small!"

There could be no mistake as to Benny's pluck. He was like a young hurricane, and, though Billy could distinguish no word, he was certain that his ally was pouring out a torrent of words.

"All about me, I'll bet. That is a subject that would stir my fellow scout up powerfully! Ah!"

There was a change in the situation.

"Benny breaks away from them! He dashes across the deck and down the gang-plank. He makes for the street. Say, I want to be in that cruise with him!"

Captain Billy ran forward, and, as his associate took just the right course, they met at the head of the pier on which the former had been keeping his watch.

Benny was making good time, but his head was bent, and Billy could hear him sounding great sobs that seemed to come straight from his heart.

Billy did not get out of the way, and, as a result, his friend only saved himself from a collision by a sudden recoil. It was a double recoil, in fact, for when the danger of a collision was over, Benny fell back another step. His manner was almost that of positive fright.

"Hallo, old chap!" exclaimed Captain Billy. "What's the matter?"

The younger Scout was looking hard. He opened his lips and tried to speak, but it was only on second attempt that he succeeded.

"You—you!" he gasped.

"Why, of course it's me."

"But—did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Take the money?"

"What money?"

"Captain Leechings says you—no, of course you didn't do it. I was crazy to ask the question. Of course you didn't."

"Come, Benny, what's all this? Out with it!" urged Billy.

The junior Scout wiped his forehead nervously. Something had gone very wrong with him, and he was looking almost ill.

"They accuse you on board the Rollin' Rock of havin' stole Leeching's money and skipped."

"What? I, stole his money? Who dares say that?"

"Leechings an' Pollock. They come bustlin' up on deck an' wanted ter know ef you was gone. Then they accused you of havin' made way with the money. See?"

"But I hadn't gone up."

"They said you had—yes, and they accused you of robbin' the cabin while you was down there."

Silence followed the statement. Captain Billy was getting it through his head, but it didn't all come at once. Slowly he took in the full meaning of the events of the occasion.

"It's all a plot against me," he finally exclaimed, "Pollock is onto my curves, and he thought to do me up."

"But where were you, and why did you go away?"

"Do you see my clothes?"

"Yes. Soaking wet, ain't they?"

"I was hit on the head and flung into

the river. I can see why it was done, too. They thought I would drown, flung in unconscious as I was, and then they would work their plot against me all right; but I hadn't been hit quite hard enough. I recovered."

"Is it possible they are such terrible villains?"

"Looks so to me. It's all because I got onto their connection with the robbery at our boat-house, too. Benny, let me show you something."

Captain Billy had recalled the theatre ticket. He thrust his hand into his pocket to get it.

"Hallo! what's this?"

He had found something he did not recognize by touch. He pulled it out of his pocket.

"A pocket-book!" exclaimed Benny.

The senior Scout stared at the object as if it had been a serpent.

"That's it!" he cried. "It was a deep plot. They thought I would be found dead in the dock, and they wanted this thing to be on me. Yes, it was a most desperate scheme to dispose of me and ruin my reputation at the same time."

"Wal, you've got off all right."

"Have I? Remember they've accused me of being a thief."

"Old Sime said he wouldn't prosecute you."

"He could well afford to say that. He thought I would be found in the dock."

"I took your part—I told them all, point blank, that they lied when they accused you."

"I saw you making your stout defense. You're a trump, Benny! But, old chap, I am in trouble now. This accusation hangs over me. I am liable to be arrested as soon as they find I am alive."

Benny's face fell.

"Jingo!" he muttered.

"Let us get somewhere that we can talk. I want to think this over. Anthony Pollock has turned the tables on me with a vengeance, and I don't just see my way clear yet. How can I do any more scouting when I am likely to be arrested?"

"By jing! I'll do it all!" cried Benny.

"If I don't find a way to get into the game again I am a perjurer!" exclaimed Billy. "Think I'm going to let Pollock down me? Not if the jury knows its verdict! Just you come with me to a quiet place, and we will arrange things all over. Maybe—I've got a trick in my head, even now—maybe I can get deeper into the heart of the game than ever before. If I do, just let them look out for themselves. From this time on I am out for business, and don't forget it!"

Captain Billy was energetic and full of enthusiasm, but his ally remained grave.

"What kin you do?" he asked.

"What can I do?"

"Yes."

"Down those fellows!"

"You are a boy—"

"I'm growing older every minute."

"And we are only two, while they seem ter be a hundred or more."

"Do you want to back out?"

"I ain't got no reason fer it, but you'll be in danger all the time, Billy."

"Don't you flatter yourself that you won't. They know you are my running mate, and they'll be after you just as sharp as me."

"Remember Pollock, Leechings, Morlock, and the men with the rope!"

"I won't back out for any of them!" cried Billy. "I don't want you to stay in if you don't feel like it—"

"Stay in!" exclaimed Benny. "Why, I'll do that ef my uppers fall off! I'm with ye ter the end, be it what it may. Bet yer necktie on that, old man!"

"Good!"

The Scouts clasped hands on the compact, and it looked as if the men of the Rolling Rock had gained nothing by their recent attempts.

"Now," pursued Billy, anon, "I am going to get some dry clothes onto my bones. When that is done, I am going to tackle a new line of investigation. Come on! Let's evaporate."

CHAPTER XI.

DAN SHERRILL'S SECRET.

Captain Billy had a well-defined plan, and when he had reached home and got into dry clothes he unfolded it to Benny Eager.

"I'm going to call around at Dan Sherrill's old home," he explained. "I don't care whether I see Dan's women folks or not, but I do want to see the people he was most intimate with there. I've got an idea. While I am on that scent, do you go to the block where the Bald Eagle Theater is, and see if you can find anybody who saw anything just about the time Dan disappeared."

"The police have tried that."

"And they say nothing is to be learned, I remember."

"Yes."

"Well, you try too."

"I'll do it."

Benny promised, but he did not seem very confident. Captain Billy devoted considerable time to urging him to be zealous in the work, and when he had aroused his ally to the importance of looking into it more closely than the police had done, the boys separated and each went his way.

Benny looked anxiously after his leader.

"I do hope that kid won't get inter no more trouble," he murmured. "He is marked by the enemy, an' they will lose no chance ter take a shy at him. I hope all will go well, though. Here's ter Captain Billy's Street Scouts!"

Billy paused not until he reached the tenement house where the missing man had lived. He expected to be obliged to go in, but luck was with him, and he found a plain, sensible-looking man lounging at the door and smoking a short pipe with some contentment, though there was a cloud on his forehead. Billy accosted him.

"How you are you, sir?" he spoke.

"So-so!" was the reply.

"Fine day."

"Yes, there is fringe on the edges."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"Know Dan Sherrill?"

The man removed his pipe, rolled his eyes peculiarly, sighed and gravely answered:

"I did."

"I see you use the past tense. What is that?"

"Dan's gone!"

"Do you think he has met with a play?"

"Young man, the question is one I can't solve. It's too deep and too broad, and too heavy. Dan is missing. I can't understand it."

"I was a friend of his, and I don't believe he has done any wrong."

"He? Well, you bet high that he hasn't. I've known him for ten years, and I would as soon suspect the mayor of this city as Dan. I say there wasn't

a dishonest thread in his moral clothes."

"Give me your hand, old man! There!—here are two good friends of his. Now, sir, you live right here with Dan. Have you no theory?"

"Not one sign of one. When I try to think my mind is a desert without one oasis into it, by gosh!"

"Dan had a good situation, didn't he?"

"For a man crippled as he was, it was just a glorious situation. It was a living, with chance to lay by something every week, and nowhere else could a crippled man have got such a fine show."

"Then we can set it down that he wouldn't run away, eh?"

"Sure!"

"He was happy and contented, was he?"

"Yes—that is, he always was until lately."

"Why not the same lately?"

The man puffed vigorously at his pipe for some time before replying. Finally he made answer:

"I don't know what came over Dan, but he had been down-hearted for a couple weeks, or so. Of course it was not anything that concerned his business life, nor his home life; but there was a load on his mind."

"What was it?"

"Maybe I ought not to tell, but I don't see that it will do any harm. I found it out by questioning Dan. 'Why are you so sad?' says I to him. He wouldn't say right off, but he finally give me some little clew to the situation."

"What was it?"

"Our talk ran about like this. Says he to me: 'If you knew a man in high life who was planning to do something mean, what would be your duty in the premises?'"

"He said that? And you—what did you answer?"

"Says I to him, 'Squelch the feller!'"

Captain Billy was deeply interested.

"And he—what did he answer?"

"He took a good deal of time, and his expression was very dark and gloomy. Finally he says: 'I am in a bad fix. I know something that you wouldn't credit, and I ought to tell it, maybe, but there are two objections. One is that I shouldn't be believed.'"

"Why not?" says I.

"I should have to speak out against a man who is rich and powerful. I could not prove my charges, and what would be the result? Who would give heed to the unsupported word of a poor man against one that was rich?"

"That was a stumper," added the narrator. "What could I answer Dan? He had told the truth. When men make accusations they have to prove them, you know."

"Who is the man?" says I.

"I can't tell you," says Dan. "All I can say is that he is rich and powerful—a bad man to run up against, you will see. If he is allowed to carry on his work it will be a terrible crime, and, maybe, life will be lost by it."

"Life lost?" cried Captain Billy.

"So he said."

"How could it be?"

"I don't know a thing of that."

"Strange!"

"It was more than strange to Dan. It just about worried the life out of him."

"He told you he had two reasons. What was the other?"

"He said it would cost him his job."

"Ah!" murmured Billy.

"I told him," added the neighbor, "that I didn't think he needed to worry about. He reminded me that business men didn't like to have their employees get into public musses. I well remember how I replied to that."

"Remember who you work for," says "There is not a more honorable and square-dealing man in New York than Anthony Pollock. He might not like you to get into public notoriety, but you can bet he wouldn't bounce you. He likes justice—Pollock does; and he would see the point and stand by you."

"What did Dan say to that?"

"He just shook his head and said nothing, and pretty soon he got up and left me. That was just five days ago. You see how it is."

Captain Billy believed he did see. His eyes were not clouded like the neighbor's. It was plain to him that the rich man referred to by Dan Sherrill was Anthony Pollock.

What had the day-watchman learned that he had felt he ought tell? Something had been impending that would be "a terrible crime," and might result in the loss of life.

Captain Billy did not understand the situation, but he was satisfied that Pollock had contemplated some desperate deed, that Dan had learned of it, and that his knowledge had ultimately cost him dear.

What was the dangerous secret he had held?

How could its nature be learned?

The young detective had learned all the neighbor could tell, and presently he took his departure. When he had disappeared his late companion strolled to the corner and partook of a glass of beer. When he had finished he stood by the open window of the saloon, looking out, and thus it was that he saw and heard two strange men who came along and halted close to the window.

They were swarthy-faced fellows, and, though they wore American clothes, were plainly from some foreign land.

"We seem to have missed him," remarked one of the pair.

"Yes. Either he did not come this way, or he has gone ahead of us."

"Luck seems to attend him."

"Never mind, Ulkos, I carry this!"

The speaker drew the loose end of a small rope from his pocket.

"You tried that before, Hamil," replied his companion.

"Luck was against us. Better luck will soon come. We will pursue the young rascal always, and the chance will come to win the master's money. We work in the dark, and we must take our time, but all will come out right."

"I hope for more than the Man of Death!"

"The green idol will yet do its work, if we don't get ahead of it."

"It is strangely slow."

"Be patient, Ulkos. All that is necessary is that the green man shall breathe just enough—then—ugh! you know what will happen!"

"I do, Hamil. The Man of Death will score a victim."

"Possibly we shall get ahead of him. Let us go on, Ulkos."

The dark-faced pair pursued their way.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERIOUS CARRIAGE.

Captain Billy pursued his way until he met Benny Eager at the place appointed previously. The younger Scout had not arrived, but he put in an appearance shortly after.

"What luck?" asked the leader.

"I've struck somethin' or I ain't," replied Benny.

"What is it?"

"You know Simple Sammy Jones?"

"Yes."

"I want you ter see him. He has a story that he told me, though he was awfully slow and shy about it, as he always is, but he finally let it out fully."

"But Sammy isn't bright," doubtfully replied Billy.

"He can see just the same."

"Would it do to take his word?"

"Just what I want to know?"

"What is his story?"

"Let's walk that way, an' I'll explain as we go."

Captain Billy agreed, and the journey was made. They found Simple Sammy without trouble, and just where Benny had left him. The youth was one of the unhappy features of the neighborhood. Nature had gifted him with life, but without any of the pleasant attributes of humanity. His intellect was painfully defective, and the harsher speech of those who knew him termed him a fool. He was little wiser than that, and much to be pitied.

Like most persons thus afflicted he had an abnormal idea of certain things, and one of his peculiarities was to be extremely secret about everything. He did not make a mystery of anything, but often denied point-blank that he knew things that surely were known to him. It was because of this that Captain Billy was well aware that Simple Sammy might have been questioned by the police and have held to his information, when asked if he knew anything of the Dan Sherrill affair.

For a few minutes Billy talked wide of the subject, but he finally began with what Benny had told him as a foundation.

"So you saw strange things that night Dan was missing, Sammy?"

"No," replied Sammy.

"Well, you saw some occurrences."

"Since I told Benny so, me did."

"First, a man called at the theater office and left a parcel with Dan Sherrill?"

"Me saw that."

"Had the play begun?"

"Yes. Everybody had gone in."

"Did you hear any talk when the parcel was left?"

"Me was passin' by, an' me heard the man ask if he leave it."

"Did Dan say yes?"

"He said so."

"What next?"

"Me passed on, an' heard no more, but, when the man followed me, the parcel was not in his hand."

"Then you saw him meet two other men and talk with them, eh?"

"It was so."

"Who were these men?"

"They had nigger blood."

"How do you know that?"

"They were very dark. Nigger blood—or maybe, Spaniards, or Mexicans. Dark faces—very black hair."

Captain Billy thought of the men who had lured him into the alley—the men of the rope.

"Did you hear any of their talk?"

"Not a word."

"What happened next?"

"They separated. Two men went one way, and one man went one way, different way," replied Simple Sammy, with unusual lack of wisdom.

"You stayed around there. After awhile you saw a carriage drive away from the theater door. Are you sure you did not see it stop there?"

"Yes, sure."

"You did not see anybody come out and enter the carriage?"

"I did not see it until she started."

"Who was inside the carriage?"

"Me saw only one man. It was him what left the parcel with Dan."

"Did you know that man?"

"To Benny I say me did not. That was strategy. He name, it was Dick Turk. Me seen him before."

"Was there no more, Sammy?"

The simple-minded youth squirmed about as if in distress. His mouth worked unnaturally, and he seemed to be in a mood where he was raising something out of the depths of his darkened mind.

Presently he turned and looked all around to make sure that nobody was listening; then he raised a long, bony finger and whispered:

"Me saw—me saw somethin' in the carriage."

"What was it?" eagerly asked Captain Billy.

"Dan!"

"Are you sure he was there?"

"Yes."

"What was he doing?"

"He was dead!"

"Dead!"

"Sure!"

"How do you know?"

"He lay back on the seat—so!" and Simple Sammy indicated. "He eyes were closed—so! He was pale—like marble! Dead! I could see it plain. No life, no motion. Dead! The men, they had killed him, and they take him body away. Dead!"

Captain Billy shivered, while Benny looked as if he wanted to run away. Sammy's words, his tragic whisper and his frightened manner were too much for their composure. He had affected his hearers far more than a strong-minded person could.

Sammy was in for a siege. Billy had many questions to ask, and he asked them all. Like a lawyer engaged in cross-questioning he tried in every way to gain more light. For half an hour he kept Sammy busy, but, at the end, nothing more was elucidated.

One thing was certain, however—Sammy firmly believed he had seen all he claimed, and it was his fixed belief that Dan Sherrill's passive condition in the carriage indicated that he was dead.

When the Scouts left Sammy they were in a very uncertain state of mind. They disagreed on an important point. Benny was of the opinion that Dan really had been lifeless, while Captain Billy took a decidedly different view.

"Knocked senseless—that's all," he surmised.

"Shall we tell the police?"

"I don't know. Sammy's word would not be taken in law, I fear, and I don't know whether the police would heed it or not. My idea is that we may as well keep still for awhile."

"That's the caper!" cried Benny. "I was afraid you would not want to keep it still. Say, don't let anybody inter this, old chap. We are gettin' on famous, an' we'll solve the whole mystery alone. We will, by jing!"

The older Scout was not so sure of that, but he finally decided not to say anything that night, especially as Captain Leechings had branded him a thief, thus placing him in a precarious position, if he went to the police.

Darkness had fallen, and, as the Scouts were both weary, they concluded to go home early and get due rest. They separated, and Captain Billy pursued his way alone. He went in deep thought,

and this made him neglectful of what was transpiring around him. He was rudely recalled to active life.

He was passing quietly along when he was suddenly seized and pushed to one side. A moment more and he was inside a house, and the door closed with a bang. He had been kidnapped; he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SCOUT HAS A FIGHT.

The violent push he had received had sent Captain Billy headlong to the floor, but he did not long remain there. He was not injured, and with an agile spring he regained his feet. What he saw was not inviting or reassuring.

He was in the hall of a miserable, tumble-down house, the door was closed, and he was face to face with Dick Turk.

That tough-looking person had never seemed uglier, and it was plain that mischief was afoot. He surveyed Billy, gloatingly, and this fact was not lost upon the Scout.

He was not crushed, however, and he quickly found speech.

"Say!" he exclaimed, "what the dickens does this mean?"

"It means," replied Dick, "that your skulkin' is about over."

"What skulking?"

"Prowlin' around about things that don't concern you."

"What things?"

"Oh! you want a bill of particulars, do ye? Well, you won't get none, but you're nabbed. See?"

"Dick Turk, open that door!"

"Not much!"

"I demand that you let me go!"

"It don't cost you a cent ter demand, but you won't go. Where you will go is another way, an' you'll do it at once!"

The tough pressed upon Billy, his hands stretched out to seize the victim.

The latter sent a swift glance backward. Nothing unusual was to be seen there, but he did not think it would be a good plan to flee in that direction. There must be other people in the house, and they would surely be in sympathy with Turk.

Only one other way was open to him, and he took it at once. He did not wait for Dick to close in upon him, but bounded upon that person like a young tiger.

There was a severe shock and Dick was bowled over, but, as he fell, he closed his hands upon Billy and held fast. The Scout reached out for the door, but he was not near enough to touch it, and Turk's grasp was like iron.

"Let me go!" cried Captain Billy.

"Not by a blamed sight!" snapped Dick.

"If you don't, I'll—"

"Help, here!" called Dick.

He could not regain his feet without losing his victim, and Billy's struggles kept him spinning around erratically.

The coveted aid was at hand, however, and another man came bounding down the stairs. Even then Billy recognized Morlock, and he knew what he had to expect.

The Scout did some quick thinking. He could not fight both men successfully, and, as Turk had rolled over against the front door, only one other way was open to the boy. He took it quickly and resolutely.

Raising his foot he kicked Dick in the arm viciously, and the fellow's hand fell as if he had been shot.

Morlock was almost there, but Billy did not wait for him.

The Scout made a rush for the back part of the house.

It was a question whether he would

pass Morlock, and it was not answered until the last minute. The bogus detective reached out over the bannisters to check the flight, but all he did was to touch Billy's shoulder lightly as the latter sped past.

One round was won, but the Scout knew not what was before him. He flung open the door and dashed into the next room. It had been his great fear that other men would be there, but the place proved to be unoccupied. Beyond was the open window that led to the back yard. He saw it with great satisfaction.

The steps of his foes were sounding behind him, and there was no time to lose. Captain Billy rushed on, reached the avenue of escape and leaped out of the window recklessly.

There was a fall of ten feet. He struck, tumbled over, but speedily regained his footing. His chances were as good as theirs then, for the area of the yard was all at his disposal, and as he saw Dick Turk appear at the window, he sent out a shout of derision.

"Get your specks on, old man!" he cried.

A window was raised on the upper floor. Billy sent a glance that way. Two men were there, looking out, and they were no strangers. They were the dark-faced men of the crooked alley and the ready rope.

"Regular nest of them!" thought the boy.

Dick Turk's pluck was good, and he, too, leaped from the window, but he was too late. Billy had sprung over the low fence and was hastening away. He took a quick survey of the premises and saw that two or three lots were empty. Toward one of them he raced at full speed, and with every step he increased his lead over the pursuer.

In a short time he had passed the vacant place and Turk was lost to sight. The Scout gained the street beyond and laughed as he recalled the scenes of his adventure.

"Richard wasn't in that brush!" he exclaimed. "He had his little trick all for nothing. With so many men in the house the trick was stupidly carried out—but I think my arrival at that particular moment was a surprise to Dick, as well as the rest. He saw me, and thought he would make the try, but his gang wasn't at hand to back him up. I was there, though."

The Scout walked on meditating on the state of affairs.

"What shall I do about it?" he mused. "I did want to leave them free to show their hand some more, but they seem bound to do me up. I don't like that. By jing! I'll walk on until I meet a patrolman, and then tell him about it. They must be arrested."

He began a circuit of the block. When he arrived near the house he began to eye it sharply. Nobody was to be seen within, but he suddenly noticed a man standing by the door of the house next to that where his adventure had occurred. This man took the lead in conversation abruptly.

"Say," he inquired, "do you know the people of that house?"

"Are there new ones there?"

"Yes. A party of men moved in only to-day. The house is always let furnished. I don't like the looks of the new tenants, and object to such neighbors."

"Who are they?"

"I don't know a thing about them. Two of them are swarthy fellows that look to me like East Indians. I've seen

them go in and out several times—the whole lot of them just went out.”

“How long ago?”

“About twenty seconds before you came.”

“I understand,” murmured Captain Billy.

It was clear to him that they had taken alarm after his escape, and fled without a minute's delay. He was too late with his project of arrest, and he gave it up then and there.

Finding that the citizen could tell no more he abandoned the attempt and went home.

When he arrived there he was weary enough to retire at once, but he did not go until he had taken another look at the green idol. He had left the little old man with his face turned to the wall, but curiosity impelled him to turn him around.

The green man was not “breathing” then. He was quiescent, and this led Captain Billy to give unusual attention to his face. Its ugliness and malevolence grew upon one who looked long, and the Scout felt a peculiar chill.

“Ugh! I don't like this. He is absolutely fiendish. I suppose I am foolish, but the notion comes over me now that the green man is capable of doing harm to me. I've heard a good deal about the cunning of foreigners. What if this is an invention calculated to work mischief to human life? Can this old man make me a mere lump of clay? Pshaw! I am foolish, of course, but I think I'll take him back to the boat-house in a day or two. I don't like his diabolical expression.”

Captain Billy turned away and prepared for bed. The last thing he did was to take another look at the green man.

“Ah! he is breathing again! Now, I must say that is odd! How can he breathe? It seems absurd, yet it is true that something like air comes from his fiendish lips. Keep it up, old fellow! I'll bother no more with you.”

Once more the Scout turned away from the idol, and this time for the night. Billy went to bed and was soon asleep.

That night he did not rest so well as usual. His slumber was disturbed by troublesome dreams, and he seemed to be in difficulty all the while. Yet, he did not awake until morning.

When he did open his eyes it was fully day, and he might ordinarily have leaped out of bed quickly. On this occasion, however, he lay still for some time. A deep languor was upon him, and his vital forces seemed at low ebb.

This continued until he suddenly aroused, hastened to the window and put his head out. There the air was much purer, and he felt relieved considerably, but when he put his head back into the room he was impressed by another fact.

“Why, there is a strong odor of something here. What can it be? It is as if a hundred bottles of perfumery had been broken here, but not a pleasant kind. Ugh! the odor is painfully heavy, rich, and oppressive. No wonder I slept badly, if this sort of thing was going on all the while. What causes it? Maybe the breath of the green man!”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UNEXPLAINED CRY.

Captain Billy laughed at the idea he had last advanced, and then dressed and went to breakfast. Having finished the meal he left the house, and had gone only a few rods when he met Benny

Eager. The younger Scout seemed to be excited over something.

“I wanted ter see ye!” he exclaimed.

“All right!—here I am.”

“I've had an adventure!”

“When?”

“Last night.”

“After you went home?”

“Wal, ter tell the truth I didn't go right off. After I left you I got so anxious fer another look at the Rollin' Rock that I went down to the dock ter do it.”

“What was the result?”

“Captain Billy, there is something wrong about that ship!”

“There's a good deal wrong, I should say. What do you mean?”

“I heard a human cry from there.”

“A cry? What sort of a cry?”

“Like somebody in distress.”

“Maybe Old Sime was licking one of his sailors.”

Benny shook his head and looked serious.

“I dunno, I dunno! It was really ghostly, only more human than that. It made my blood chill.”

“Tell me all about it, Benny.”

“Well, you see I took a quiet sneak down that way an' found the vicinity as black as a Dago's best shine, an' as still as a cemetery. I got up as close ter the Rollin' Rock as I could convenient, an' then I lay down behind a small box, poked my head around the corner an' sort o' watched fer developments.”

“I guess it was ten minutes before I heerd anything. Meanwhile, I could see some o' the sailors on the deck, an' they seemed quiet an' contented.”

“Where I lay I could see some o' the cabin winders, an' as they showed some little light I generally watched them more than the deck. I didn't forget that secrets lay below decks, if at all.”

“It was just that way—still an' peaceful-lookin'—when all of a sudden there was a wild cry from the ship.”

“If I had been asleep it would have scared me, but I wasn't, so I was scared all the more. I don't know why, but my gaze sorter flashed ter them cabin winders.”

“Did you see anything?” cried Captain Billy, eagerly.

“I did that!”

“What?”

“A man clad all in white.”

“Where?”

“In one o' the staterooms.”

“What was he doing?”

“It wasn't him that was doing—'twas the other feller.”

“What other fellow?”

“Why, ye see, just as I looked, I seen a second man leap upon the first one, grip him by the neck an' pull him over back. Both went out o' my view like a flash, an—that was all I saw.”

“Did you hear no more?”

“Not a thing.”

Captain Billy was silent for a moment, meditating on the event.

“Well,” he finally commented, “it proves that there is violence on board, but that we knew before. Old Sime is a man who rules with an iron hand, and, it seems, can whip his men even in port and get away the trick.”

“I don't think this was a sailor that was pulled over back.”

“No? What, then?”

“Billy, maybe you'll laugh at me—”

“Out with it!”

“I thought it looked like Dan Sherrill!”

“What?”

“Fact, by jing! I only had a short look, but that was the way it seemed

ter me—jest like Dan. Don't you remember, Billy, that when we was down that way we mentioned that possibly Dan was right aboard the Rollin' Rock?”

“It was mentioned.”

“Wal, I think it was right.”

“It seems absurd.”

“Why so? If he's alive he is somewhere, ain't he? Why not as likely there as anywhere?”

“We have talked this all over before. We have admitted that, if anybody wants to get rid of Dan, it would be a fine scheme to take him away in the Rolling Rock. But if that's done, the sailors will get onto the fact.”

“Old Sime must have some aboard who are as bad as he is.”

“Fact. Then, again, the decent ones, if they learned of it at all, might not do it in time to—save Dan.”

“Wal, I ain't told all.”

“What more?”

“When I left the vessel I started fer home at a lively clip, but I pulled up before I had gone fer, now you bet. Billy, I was passin' a lonesome place when I seen them two swarthy chaps, Hindoos, or whatever they be, standin' right ahead o' me.”

“Near the ship?”

“About two blocks off. They were quiet enough, but I felt right from the start that mischief was in them. Pretty soon one o' them pulled a rope, or cord, out o' his pocket an' whisked it around in the air. I knew they was the same fellers that tried ter get you with a rope, in the alley, an' I fit shy o' them. I kept where I was and waited.”

“Were they lying in wait for a victim?”

“Seems not—guess they only aim to victimize you an' me. After a bit they moved my way, an' I slid back inter an alley an' let them have all the room they wanted. They were talkin' an' in English, too.”

“Did you hear anything?”

“As they passed me I heard this much—one o' them said: ‘Luck has not been with us, but the boys will soon sleep their last sleep.’”

“That must be us, Benny. What next?”

“The other one answered: ‘It will soon be over. When they meddled with this affair they sealed their doom. They did not know of the Man of Death!’”

“What is the Man of Death?” asked Captain Billy.

“I don't know.”

“Nor I. I suppose it was only some figurative speech. Well, we are duly warned, and we may be able to make a decent fight yet.”

“Do you suppose that Dan Sherrill is shut up in that ship?”

Captain Billy was silent for some time. Whe he spoke it was to the point.

“I've had a notion in my head for some time that it wouldn't be a bad idea for me to see the junior partner of Pollock, Oliver & Co. We have nothing to show that he is in any scheme to misuse Dan, or anybody else, and, as we are only kids, some good might come of it.”

Benny did not like this plan at first, but, the more they talked it over, the more Billy grew to think well of it, and his ally finally yielded. As a result, Billy found Alden Oliver's address in the directory, and then set out to call on him before he could get to his office.

He found Oliver in, and was admitted to his presence without any trouble. Oliver was a man of some forty years, and the Scout liked his looks from the start. Some delicacy and diplomacy were

needed to make the case plain and not commit any error about it, but Billy was equal to the emergency, and, though it took some time, he finally told all that was necessary.

Oliver heard with a serious expression which told how he was accepting the story, though he interjected few comments. Of questions he asked many, and, when Billy had finished, his listener sat in deep thought for some time. The caller did not interrupt, and presently Oliver spoke again.

"What motive could Mr. Pollock have for all this?" he inquired.

"Well, as I've hinted, I suspect that Dan knew some secret of his that Pollock didn't want should get out."

"Mr. Pollock is rich, respected, well along in years, and of a class in life very different from Sherrill."

"All that is true."

"In private life I cannot believe he had any skeleton in the closet. As to business, he is about to retire from the firm."

"Why?"

"He is not young, and he does not need to toil and slave any longer."

"Mr. Oliver, are you so sure he is dead honest?"

"Such has been his reputation during thirty years of business life."

"And you believe it?"

"I have done so fully."

"Then what do you make of the things I have told you?"

"Granting that you have told the truth, and that seems to be sure, I cannot excuse his work. Your adventure on the Rolling Rock, when you were thrown into the dock and falsely accused, cannot be explained away. It is very singular. Then the possibility that—well, well, I'll look into this. I must! The reputation of the firm is at stake, and the truth must be known. Young man, you can go now, but I will do my part of looking about, and if you learn more, do you come to me."

Captain Billy left the house with this understanding.

CHAPTER XV.

SHUT IN!

The Scout hastened away from the vicinity with long steps, and engaged in deep thought.

"Alden Oliver was cautious," he mused, "but I do believe he smells a mouse. He wouldn't tell me, though. I think he has a clear suspicion, and something may come of it."

Straight to the place where Benny Eager was waiting the older Scout went. Benny was anxious to know the results of the trip, and he was receiving a due explanation when Captain Billy suddenly broke off and looked elsewhere so hard that Benny irritably asked:

"Do ye see a ghost?"

"Look at that cab. Who is on the box?"

"Why, that's our old friend, Morlock."

"What is he driving that outfit for?"

"Some trick."

"I don't think so. He carries himself like a man who is wholly familiar with his business. Morlock has claimed to be a detective, but that was exploded. It strikes me he is a cab-driver by trade. Say, fall in, and let's see where he goes!"

The plan was carried out. Morlock did not hurry, but jogged along at fair speed, and, as they were enabled to use a street car a part of the time in the pursuit, they had no great trouble in keeping up with him.

It impressed them both as suggestive

when he finally halted at a livery stable only three blocks from the pier where the Rolling Rock lay in her dock, and entered that place with the air of one at home. Keeping well back they saw his team taken in charge by the hostlers. In a few minutes Morlock came out and sauntered away.

"Goin' ter foller him?" asked Benny.

"I have a different idea," replied Captain Billy. "I'm going into that stable. Our information is that Dan Sherrill went off in a carriage. Now, we seem to have good evidence that Morlock, whom we know to be in with the gang, is a driver. See the point?"

"Sure!"

"Into the stable we go, then. Come!" Billy led, and his ally followed.

The first person they encountered was a hostler, and Captain Billy accosted him immediately.

"Hallo, mister!"

"Hallo!" was the surly response.

"I wanted to see a driver of yours. Any of them in?"

"No."

"What's that team that the other fellow is putting up? Isn't that one of yours?"

"Yes. Aleck Gooch drives it. He's just come in."

"Aleck is the man. So he isn't in?"

"Just went out."

"I wanted to ask about a fare of his. Aleck was out on Tuesday evening, wasn't he?"

"Yes. Captain Leechings, of the Rolling Rock, had the team that night. Not that he went with it, but he hired it. Aleck drove it."

"Where did they go?"

"Don't know. You'll have to ask Aleck that. I think they took somebody down to the Rollin' Rock, a ship down by the piers. If you want information very bad you might go there. It will do you good to interview Captain Leechings—he's a fine man. I wish I had the job he has. He's sailed vessels for Pollock, Oliver & Co. ever since I can remember, an' old Pollock is quite chummy with the captain."

"Are you sure that Leechings didn't go with the carriage that night?"

"Why, I don't know anything about it, really. Maybe he did. It wouldn't surprise me if there was a theater party, an' he was one o' them. What makes me say that is this."

The hostler stepped to one side and took something into his hand.

"I found this in the carriage when it was brought in," he added. "I hadn't thought of it since, or I'd have given this to Aleck."

The speaker held out a bit of pasteboard, and Captain Billy saw that it was one of the tickets that had been used by the Bald Eagle Club the night that Dan Sherrill disappeared. He took it with an effort to be calm.

"So you found this in the cab, eh?"

"Yes."

"It does seem to be a theater ticket. Was there anything else that you found in the carriage?"

"Nothing but the seats," gruffly replied the hostler. "See here! why are you so curious about that night? Why do you want to know so much about where Aleck drove to, anyhow?"

The question would not have meant much under some circumstances, but it so happened that, just then, footsteps sounded back of the boys, and, as they turned around, they saw that which put an entirely different face upon the case.

Morlock, alias Aleck Gooch, had entered, and with him was Anthony Pol-

lock. More, they must have heard every word of the last speech.

The scouts found themselves beset by two frowning men, and anger and suspicion were easily distinguishable in both cases. Pollock, in particular, seemed to be in a rage.

"What's this, what's this?" he cried. "What are these brats doing here?"

The hostler was quick to try to make himself safe on the question.

"I don't know their business," he responded, "but they've been asking more questions than I can answer in a week."

"About what?"

"The trip Aleck took last Tuesday night."

"By Jupiter! I shall have a word to say about that!" exclaimed Pollock. "Prying into other people's affairs, are they? That's an old trick of theirs. This case shall be explained!"

Pollock showed no surprise at finding Captain Billy alive, so it was clear that he had previously been informed of his intended victim's escape from the waters of the river.

"What in perdition do you mean?" he added, loudly, addressing the scouts.

It was somewhat against the boys that they were cut off from retreat by the position of Pollock and Aleck, and they knew they had no good to expect from the hostler, but Captain Billy presented a bold front and looked Pollock squarely in the eyes.

"As near as I can figure it out," he returned, coolly, "I have a right to ask all the questions I see fit. Why should an honest man care if I do ask them?"

"Honest man?"

"That's what I said."

"What do you mean to insinuate, boy?"

"Why, my words seem to have touched you, somehow. Why should they? Why should the rich and lofty Anthony Pollock object to my investigating the night that Dan Sherrill disappeared so mysteriously?"

There was no beating around the bush. Captain Billy had come to the point with directness, and Benny, shaking a little in his shoes, but very proud to have such a brave ally, felt that there was bound to be a crisis right away.

Pollock was plainly hit hard. His color changed to a strange sort of ashen hue; then his eyes took on a gleam so terrible that Billy rather wished he was out of the stable.

"This has gone far enough!" finally cried the ship-owner. "I am not to be insulted and brow-beaten by boys—not if I know myself. Gooch, these meddlers must go no further with their work. Close that door at once!"

The exit to the street banged to, shutting the scouts in.

"Now," added Pollock, "we will settle these young dogs without delay!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GREEN IDOL

The clang of the stable door was an ominous sound to the scouts. Not only did it shut off their escape to the street, but it left them penned in with their worst enemies. Even Captain Billy was rattled for a moment, but he had nothing to say.

Pollock glared upon them with unabated hostility.

"Hostler," he continued, addressing the employee, "have you a tank where we can drown these vermin?"

"Better not try it!" cried Billy, recovering speech. "You know how you

came out the other time. Open that door!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Open that door, I say!"

"Keep on saying it. Your wants go for nothing here. You have meddled and pried around until you have got where you'll have to make amends for it. Aleck, bind them! There's a rope yonder. Tie them up so they will stay!"

Morlock was willing enough, and advanced and secured the rope.

"I warn you," exclaimed Billy, "not to do this thing. We are no longer friendless boys—we have friends who are watching outside, and if there is any great delay about our returning they will be around to see what the trouble is."

"Aleck, tie them up!"

Pollock was not to be thrown off the track, and his voice was imperious as he gave the direction. Aleck advanced to carry out the order, but the scouts fell back.

"Better not!" warned Captain Billy.

"Here, you hostler, give your help and you shall be well paid. Seize those youngsters!"

Captain Billy caught up a shovel, and Benny armed himself with a heavy whip. The hostler was willing enough, but the bold front of the scouts brought him and Aleck to a momentary halt.

"I warn you," pursued Billy, "that I shall strike the first man who tries to touch me, and I shall strike to do damage."

"Men, don't let two young brats frighten you!" ordered Pollock.

"Make a dash together," advised Aleck.

"All right. Are you ready?"

"Yes. Come on! Now!"

The rush was made, but the scouts dodged with skill and agility and won the first round in the battle. Billy found chance to whisper to his ally.

"Don't forget the door! Next time try to make that place and skip. They didn't fasten the door."

"Done!" agreed Benny.

Pollock, now intensely in wrath, continued to urge his men on.

"You take them on that side, and I'll move this way!" directed Aleck. "Now, forward!"

The rush was again made, but the boys dodged with their former expertness, and Billy, recognizing the fact that Aleck was the most dangerous man present, deftly thrust the shovel in front of his legs.

Aleck tripped, stumbled, and fell with a tremendous crash.

"Malediction!" shouted Pollock, "how long will you let this thing go on? I'll take a hand in it myself; I'll fix them! I'll—"

The ship-owner paused, looked wildly, and then his cries took on a new tone and meaning.

"The door, the door! They are trying to get out!"

It was rather late to tell of it, for the scouts had reached the door, and Billy's hand it was that opened the way to freedom.

They dashed out to the street.

"What now?" asked Benny, panting.

"Home, and send for Alden Oliver!"

Angry cries were sounding from the stable, but they knew they must make haste in their retreat and not give Pollock a chance to tell any falsehoods about them.

"Guess we've got that little game all to ourselves!" cried Benny, in exultation.

"We want to get home, Benny. Mr.

Oliver told me if I learned enough to warrant it, to send for him. We have found out that Leechings hired the carriage that night; that Aleck drove it; that somebody or something was brought to the Rolling Rock, and that a theater ticket was found in the carriage when it came back to the stable. If that isn't enough evidence, what is?"

"Let's hustle to Mr. Oliver."

"No. He told me to send a messenger boy. I'll do it, and then we will wait at my room for orders."

This plan was followed, and, in due time, Billy's room was reached. They went at once to it.

"Jingo! what's this?" exclaimed Benny.

"That odor again!" added Billy, in surprise.

"Why, it makes me fairly sick! I can't go in there. What is it?"

The room was laden with air that was painful to breathe, and the smell of it was deep and stifling. But one window was open. Billy crossed the floor and raised the other.

"Well, you must use a tremendous perfumery!" cried Benny. "What is it, anyhow?"

Captain Billy would have confessed ignorance, but he noticed that a purring sort of noise filled the room, and he stalked up to the mantel where the green image stood. Two facts at once became clear: The idol was "breathing" much louder than usual, and his breath was singularly fragrant! An odor was sent forth that might have been pleasant had it not been so intense and heavy. As it was, it was painful to nostrils and lungs alike.

"It's this confounded green imp!" exclaimed Billy.

"What! does he give out a smell?"

"Ask your own nostrils. As for me, I would like to know what this weird, unnatural, mysterious thing is!"

As if to answer, perhaps, the green man began to roll his eyes wildly, and Benny fell back hastily.

"Ugh! I don't want anything more of that horrible thing!" he cried.

"Neither do I," replied Billy. "This odor is overcoming me. It throws a strange spell upon me. If he had breathed as heavily as this last night I do believe I never should have woken up. Even now it makes me sleepy, and if I endure it longer I shall really fall asleep here."

"Ditto!"

"I'll pitch it into the back yard!"

"Stop!"

"Why?"

"The green man might explode."

"Nonsense!"

"We don't know. Just give it to me and I'll carry it down and set it where you want it. Here! Hand over that creature!"

Benny seized the idol, and, holding it out at arm's length, hastened from the room. Billy put his own head out and watched until he saw his ally deposit the green image as planned. Then Benny returned.

"That thing!" cried Benny, "is some fiendish invention of them men from India. Now, don't take it into your room again, or you'll lose yer life by it. That perfumery is calculated just for that purpose, and don't you take no risks—"

His further speech was drowned. There was a roar, a trembling of the house, a rattling of the windows, and the shock of a heavy explosion made the boys stagger back.

"Gas has burst!" exclaimed Billy.

"Dynamite, more likely!" added the younger scout. "It was right near-by, too."

Captain Billy suddenly started.

"The green man!" he cried, excitedly. "I wonder—"

He ran to the window again.

"The green man is gone!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"He has disappeared, and there are big holes in the fence beyond where you put him down."

"What does it mean?"

"There is but one way to account for it—the idol has exploded!"

Both of the scouts were looking out, and so were all the other people of the block. There was abundant proof that Captain Billy had spoken the truth. There had been an explosion, the fence was shattered, and the green image was not to be seen!

Presently the boys drew their heads back into the room and looked at each other seriously.

"Say," spoke Benny Eager, "what if that thing had blowed up in here?"

"It would have meant death to us!" confessed Billy.

"'Twas a narrow escape."

"My recent fears of the monster have been proved correct. It was truly a terrible device. Somebody invented it to do ruin, and it was a close shave that it didn't succeed with us."

"It was a double-barrelled danger, it seems. The odor was putting us to sleep, and we kin guess what that means. But how could the jigger breathe and send out that deadly odor?"

"I can guess that there were chemicals inside. They made the smell, and when they were working they sent out air—that was what we have called the 'breath.'"

"An' it was a drug ter put folks to sleep."

"Just so. It seems—say, why was this in Dan Sherrill's office that night?"

"Do you mean—"

"Did it put him to sleep, so they could do as they pleased around him? Remember Simple Sammy's story that a parcel was left with Dan just before he disappeared. Did somebody impose upon his good nature, and get him to keep this green thing awhile, and did it put him to sleep?"

"Looks that way, by jing!"

"I think we have guessed it. Now, let us go down and see what is left of the idol."

They went, but there was not much to find except the ruin that it had wrought to the fence and its surroundings. Bits of the green man were found here and there, and some of them were in the form of minute pieces of machinery, but there was not enough in one piece to convey much meaning.

While they were still examining, another member of the household came to Captain Billy with the announcement:

"A gentleman is here to see you. His name is Alden Oliver."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FINAL RAID.

An hour later a carriage paused on the street near the ship Rolling Rock. Four persons alighted from it—the Street Scouts, a stern-looking stranger, and Alden Oliver.

Without delay they passed down the pier to the ship and walked up the gang-plank.

Anthony Pollock was most about the company's vessels, but Mr. Oliver was well known, and all on deck saluted him

respectfully. This mark of recognition he briefly acknowledged, but, without a word, he marched below, his companions at his heels.

In the cabin they found Simon Leechings poring over a chart.

He looked up as the junior partner entered, and the nervous start told that his visitors were not especially agreeable to him. Mr. Oliver nodded curtly.

"Captain Leechings," he brusquely began, "I wish to inspect the vessel."

"Eh?—eh? Inspect it, sir?" stammered Old Sime.

"So I said, sir."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir; but, Mr. Pollock has done that fully—and so have I, and—"

"I am not talking about what others have done, sir. I—I wish to inspect the ship! Lead the way!"

The mariner's gaze wandered to Billy's face, and his own color faded perceptibly.

"At once," added Oliver, icily.

There was no help for it, and Leechings yielded, but his composure did not return in any measure. Leaving the others in the cabin, Old Sime and Oliver went on their tour of "inspection."

The minutes rolled on—five, ten, fifteen, twenty; then footsteps sounded and the inspectors returned. But they came not alone. Side by side with Oliver walked another man, and Captain Billy's face suddenly lighted up with joy.

"Dan Sherrill!" he exclaimed. "Dear old Dan!"

The missing treasurer was there, pale and somewhat worn, but evidently not much the worse for his experiences. Billy rushed forward and clasped his hand, and then set a chair for him. Oliver looked at the stranger of the party.

"Mr. Detective," he directed, "do your duty!"

The stranger walked forward to the master of the Rolling Rock.

"Captain Leechings," he spoke, "you are my prisoner!"

"Oh! no, no!" cried the frightened mariner, "don't lay the blame upon me. Anthony Pollock did it all—he was the guilty man. I only obeyed his orders."

"We will see about that. Dan Sherrill, the time has come for you to speak out fully. What brought you here?"

Sherrill took his turn at looking frightened.

"I—I had rather not say, sir," he weakly replied.

"Better serve the living lion than the dead wolf! Anthony Pollock is exposed. We want your statement. Out with it!"

"I have been long an employee of your firm, sir."

"You have, and you owe a duty to the decent part of it. Will you follow out that duty, or fall in with the infamous plots of Anthony Pollock?"

"Who speaks my name?"

It was a new voice at the extremity of the cabin, and when they turned they saw Pollock himself within the room. He had come quietly, but, though it was not likely he had heard much that had been said, his expression told of alarm.

"Who speaks of me?" he demanded, savagely. "Who dares accuse me of any wrong-doing?"

"I do!" retorted Oliver, almost fiercely.

"You, you? My junior in the firm?"

"Your partner—yes, but not associated with you in crime."

"Who dares accuse me of crime?"

"I do!"

"'Tis a foul lie! Has this man—this scurvy watchman of mine—has he dared to tell any lie about me?"

"Be careful, Anthony Pollock. Dick Turk is in the toils and has made full confession."

"Of what? He had nothing to confess—"

"Stop! You say there is nothing. Let me speak. I, at least, have the honor of the old house of Pollock, Oliver & Co. at heart. I will not see its reputation of many years dragged in the dust, and mud, and slime. You sought to do that just as you were retiring from business; but you have failed. The truth will out, now."

"Lies, lies, all lies!" shouted Pollock. "I will kill the man who dares to accuse me! I'll have justice!—I'll have revenge! No man shall accuse me. If he does I will—I will—"

The old merchant clutched at his throat, and, clutching, fell to the floor and lay writhing painfully.

"An apoplectic fit!" exclaimed the detective. "Go for a doctor. This may prove fatal."

Benny Eager was the messenger, and the doctor, ere long, was there. He at once pronounced the case serious, and had Pollock put to bed. All was ready, now, for the next act in the drama.

Alden Oliver realizing that there was no way to avoid publicity called in several of the crew to attest his statements and told his story.

He dwelt for a long while on the house of which he was a member and which had been founded by his father and Pollock jointly; then he came to the vital part.

"I know not what possessed Anthony Pollock in these, his later days, but, when he decided to retire from business, he was apparently possessed of a wild desire to add more money to his already large accumulation. The most charitable way of accounting for what followed is to believe him not fully of sound mind."

"He planned to send out an inferior cargo on this vessel, heavily insured, and have the Rolling Rock scuttled at sea. When he broached this plan to Simon Leechings he found a willing tool. Of course the captain was to share in this lawless act, or, rather, its money return."

"All might have succeeded, only that, by chance, Dan Sherrill became possessed of the secret. He was an honest man and devoted to the interests of the firm, but this made his position all the harder, for he did not like to reveal what would disgrace the old house."

"While he was hesitating as to what he should do, Pollock, knowing that he had learned the secret, acted ahead of him. He determined to kidnap Sherrill, bring him to this vessel, and let him perish at sea when the Rolling Rock went down. All of this diabolical plan was carried out but the last chapter. How it was done was in this wise:

"On his last voyage home Leechings brought from India two Hindoos of the names of Hamil and Ulkos. From them Leechings learned of a certain invention of theirs, and when he told Pollock it was brought into play."

"It was an infernal machine fashioned like a man, colored green, and filled with chemicals and machinery. If set going, like a clock, the green man or image would first send out a perfumery that was a sleeping drug if used slightly, but sure death in large quantities. More after the machinery had run a certain length of time, the chemicals would mix inside and bring about an explosion that would shatter everything within reach."

"Sherrill was kidnapped from the ticket-office of the Bald Eagle Boat Club.

This was a device to avert suspicion. The green man was introduced there, in running order. It put Sherrill to sleep. Then came the kidnappers, who took him away in a carriage. The green man was left in the office, so that it would explode and cause enough ruin to make it difficult to tell what had happened. The money they took, however, so that suspicion would surely fall upon the unfortunate treasurer."

"Sherrill was brought here, and here he has been ever since, shut up in the Rolling Rock. But he has now been rescued; he is as well as he ever was, fortunately for him and for others."

"The green man has exploded, though his destruction was long delayed. You see, the machinery got out of order, so that it was running only a part of the time. Thus, not only was the explosion delayed, but the perfumed drug given forth was never in large enough quantities to cause absolute injury to those near the idol, so called."

"Dick Turk is under arrest and has confessed. By this time I hope that Hamil and Ulkos, the Hindoos, are seized by the police. All illegally mixed up in the affair will be prosecuted, even to one Peter Brison, a boy who watched while the kidnappers did their work that night. He well deserves it."

Mr. Oliver then advanced to Captain Billy and Benny Eager.

"Here are two boys of different caliber, and they, too, shall have their reward. They have been brave, prudent and wise beyond their years, and I shall reward them practically."

He shook both by the hand, and the two Street Scouts felt that they had already received good satisfaction for their adventures and dangers.

Within the next few weeks several changes happened. Anthony Pollock died in the cabin of the Rolling Rock, and Leechings, Turk, Morlock, Peter Brison, and the Hindoos, Hamil and Ulkos, went to prison on appropriate terms.

Dan Sherrill resumed his old place in the warehouse, and Mr. Oliver kept his promise to Billy and his fellow Scout. Both were given work at good pay where they had a chance to rise as their merits warranted. Some day they may be partners in that yet prosperous old house.

THE END.

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